

<http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/>

Research Commons at the University of Waikato

Copyright Statement:

The digital copy of this thesis is protected by the Copyright Act 1994 (New Zealand).

The thesis may be consulted by you, provided you comply with the provisions of the Act and the following conditions of use:

- Any use you make of these documents or images must be for research or private study purposes only, and you may not make them available to any other person.
- Authors control the copyright of their thesis. You will recognise the author's right to be identified as the author of the thesis, and due acknowledgement will be made to the author where appropriate.
- You will obtain the author's permission before publishing any material from the thesis.

An Examination of White/Pākehā Young Adults Changing their Religious Identity in New Zealand

By Luke Furborough

ABSTRACT

The examination of religion within the field of sociology in New Zealand (NZ) is a neglected area of research within academic scholarship. New Zealand is considered a secular society; therefore research examining changes in religiosity has been regarded to have little relevance. New Zealand census data from 2001 to 2018 demonstrates an overall decline in New Zealanders' religiosity, particularly Christianity, with young adults aged 20 to 30 years demonstrating the greatest decline in affiliation with Christianity. This thesis seeks to examine factors influencing the decline in religious identity/affiliation with Christianity among white/Pākehā New Zealand young adults aged 20 to 30 years. Although researchers, historians and academics acknowledge the religious decline in New Zealand, little research has been conducted within the New Zealand context exploring why young adults are no longer self-identifying with Christianity. This study employed an online survey collecting qualitative and quantitative data. Fifty-two young adults aged 20 to 30 years who had previously self-identified as Christian, and at the time of surveying were no longer affiliated with Christianity responded. Data analysis revealed the overarching theme of cognitive dissonance, the inability to reconcile childhood religious teaching, and their subsequent life experiences, as the primary factor contributing to young adult disaffiliation with Christianity. Cognitive dissonance was demonstrated in three key areas of conflict: moral and political, general church and Christian, and scientific and intellectual. These findings highlight that respondents identified these issues as harmful, attributing to their disaffiliation with Christianity. Particularly, respondents identified religious rhetoric with regard to gender roles, purity culture, treatment and judgement of LGBTQI communities, displaying manipulation and judgement, and the disrespect and disregard for scientific teachings as the primary drivers of their discontentment. In conclusion, Christianity was found to be both irrelevant and in conflict with lived experiences. Their life experiences within a secular New Zealand were not able to be reconciled with their religious teachings received during childhood and within youth based Christian communities on the Christian view of morals, science, intellectual thought,

biblical and general Christian beliefs, and values. This research explores contemporary experiences of Christianity as it relates to young adults, thus having broader implications for future research seeking to unpack changing social and cultural values among young white/ Pākehā New Zealand populations.

Key words: secularisation theory, secular, cognitive dissonance, evangelical, Christian, LGBTQI, sexuality, science, intellectual, judgement, sin, hell.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my amazing wife Erin (elfie), thank you for being my biggest supporter in life and throughout the process of this research. Your support goes above and beyond and has come in many different shapes and forms; from listening to my rants, debating and contributing to my theories and encouraging me to keep writing. There are not enough words to express how much of a blessing you are to me and how thankful I am for you, you are my planet. This research is for you.

Thank you to my awesome friends who sat through and listened to my theories, monologues and next interesting thing I had to say (or so I thought). To my family, for your interest in my research and encouragement along the way, thank you. Especially Nana (Bev Haugh) you are the goat.

Thank you to my supervisor Dr Adele Norris for your time, guidance and direction on the journey that was undertaking this research.

Lastly, thank you to all the participants who contributed to this research, without whom this thesis would not be possible. My intention is to give you and your testimony a voice, and I hope I have represented and communicated your story honestly. My hope is that your stories and experiences will help others.

This research is for those who have been unable to tell their story, who haven't been listened to and whose experiences have been neglected. Let us begin to tell your story.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
LIST OF FIGURES.....	8
LIST OF TABLES	8
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	9
STATE OF THE NATION – NEW ZEALAND CENSUS DATA ON RELIGION	12
<i>Declining Affiliation with Christianity.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Denominational Breakdown of Reported Christians.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Religion Data Stratified by Age</i>	<i>18</i>
RESEARCH QUESTION.....	23
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	25
LITERATURE REVIEW METHODOLOGY	25
HISTORIC CONTEXT OF CHRISTIANITY IN NEW ZEALAND	26
<i>Christianity Introduced by Missionaries</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Locational Denomination.....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Influence of the New Zealand Land Wars on Missionary Involvement</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>The Ratana Movement and Political Engagement</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Post World-War One Generations and Religious Decline</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>The 1960's and Two Styles of Christianity - Liberal and Evangelical.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>The 1960's and the Changing Cultural Picture.....</i>	<i>32</i>
NEW ZEALAND; A SECULAR VERSUS RELIGIOUS SOCIETY.....	33
<i>Secularization Theory.....</i>	<i>33</i>

DECLINING RATE OF CHRISTIANITY	35
SPIRITUALITY AND PERSONAL RELIGION	35
HOME LIFE AND HOME SOCIALIZATION.....	37
INFLUENCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION.....	38
<i>Parental Religiosity and Higher Education.....</i>	39
NETWORK EFFECT ON RELIGIOSITY.....	39
<i>Newfound Freedoms.....</i>	41
BIBLICAL & THEOLOGICAL INCONSISTENCY	42
CHRISTIANITY AND SCIENCE; RELATIONSHIP AND INFLUENCE	44
<i>Historiographical Conflict Thesis.....</i>	45
<i>Creationism versus Evolution</i>	45
YOUNG ADULTS AND DISAFFILIATION WITH CHRISTIANITY: PRESENCE OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT WITHIN MORAL AND POLITICAL DEBATES	47
<i>Disagreement on Moral and Political Issues – Case Example Homosexuality and Marriage Equality</i>	48
<i>The Church’s Monopoly on Morality.....</i>	51
GENDER AND AFFILIATION WITH CHRISTIANITY.....	52
SEXUAL ACTIVITY.....	54
<i>The Role of Abuse in Disaffiliation with Christianity</i>	55
IMPACT OF RELIGION, CHRISTIANITY, ON INDIVIDUAL MENTAL HEALTH	56
CONCLUSIONS FROM THE LITERATURE	58
CHAPTER 3: DESCRIPTION OF METHODS AND ANALYSIS.....	59
STUDY SETTING AND POPULATION	59
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	59
DATA COLLECTION PROTOCOL	60
LIMITATIONS	61
DESCRIPTION OF SURVEY	63

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS:	65
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS	66
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS	66
PARTICIPANT RELIGIOSITY DEMOGRAPHICS.....	68
CHILDHOOD RELIGIOSITY	70
TRANSITION OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY	74
SELF-IDENTIFIED POSITION ON VALUES, BELIEFS, TRADITIONS, AND RULES	75
<i>Values and Beliefs</i>	75
<i>Rules and Traditions</i>	77
CURRENT AGREEMENT WITH RELIGIOUS TEACHING ON SPECIFIC TOPICS	79
REASONS FOR DISAFFILIATION WITH CHRISTIANITY	81
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	85
COGNITIVE DISSONANCE.....	86
<i>Moral or Political Conflict</i>	90
<i>General Church or Christianity Conflicts</i>	94
<i>Scientific and/or Intellectual Conflict</i>	98
OPPORTUNITY FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	104
CONCLUSIONS	106
REFERENCES.....	108
APPENDIX: ONLINE SURVEY	116

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	13
Figure 2	15
Figure 3	17
Figure 4	19
Figure 5	19
Figure 6	21
Figure 7	67
Figure 8	67
Figure 9	68
Figure 10	69
Figure 11	70
Figure 12	71
Figure 13	71
Figure 14	75
Figure 15	79
Figure 16	80

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.....	73
Table 2.....	73
Table 3.....	81
Table 4.....	83

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Religion has been a neglected area of study within sociology in New Zealand (NZ) for the past 25 years, as commented by Ward in 2016 (Ward, 2016). However, since this observation, a significant dearth remains wherein religion has become a neglected topic in sociology inquiry (Ward, 2016). This is of particular interest given subsequent census data that reveals religiosity among New Zealanders, regarding self-identifying Christians is declining. Yet, religion has featured notably in social movements and voting patterns in the past decade (Malloy, 2017). Ward (2016) notes that the decline captured by the NZ census could explain the lack of attention religion has received in the sociology of religion, which has also contributed to the growing debates that NZ is becoming more secular, especially in comparison to countries like the United States (Ward, 2016). Since the 1960s, secularism has been at the centre of the debate of religious decline in New Zealand; however, secularism has been a part of New Zealand history since the birth of the Colonial Government (Cooke, 2010; Dakin, 2007; Troughton, 2016). Religious decline has been labelled as inevitable within modern societies by secularisation theory, but within the current literature, secularisation theory has been challenged and largely discredited even by some of its creators, arguing that diversification and pluralisation of religion, instead of decline, is what is at the heart of religious change in NZ (Hoverd & Sibley, 2010; Pratt, 2016; Troughton et al., 2014; Ward, 2016). Pluralisation argues that an individual's religiosity is shifting focus from structured religion to increasing awareness of multiple spiritualities and other non-institutionalised personal beliefs (Barber, 1973; Cook, 2016; Fowler, 1991; Saxton, n.d.; Vaughn, 2016; Ward, 2016).

New Zealand is a small and relatively young country with a population of just under 5 million people. The colonization of NZ occurred much later compared to other colonized Western countries, with the Treaty of Waitangi, the founding document, signed in 1840 at a time of no established religion in NZ

(Cooke, 2010; Dakin, 2007; Walker, 1990). The first missionaries, according to Ranginui Walker (1990), arrived bearing the cross and bible in 1814 with the mission of converting the Māori from heathenism to Christianity and savagery to civilisation (Walker, 1990). Shortly after the missionaries' arrival, which Walker (1990) describes as a glorified mission masking the insidious nature of the British cultural invasion, "the settlers of the New Zealand Company and Captain William Hobson came to annex the country as another jewel to add to the Crown of the British Empire" (Walker, 1990, p. 9). The missionaries railed against icons sacred to Māori, associating them as works of the Devil, which systematically undermined Māori Myths and spiritual beliefs in order to replace them with their own (Walker, 1990). This shows that religion, especially Christianity, has always played a significant role with the arrival of the settlers, serving as a tool for white settlers to gain access to land and resources that extended into political power (Smith, 2012; Walker, 1990).

Long-term increasing immigration rates into NZ has resulted in diversification of religion, seen not only with the introduction and growth of new religions, such as Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism, but also with the ethnic Christian diversity developing, with the emergence and growth of Pacific Island, Asian and South African churches (Lineham, 2014; Ward, 2016). The diversity of other religions is proportionally very small when compared to self-identified Christianity, which although is declining, is still the largest reported identified religion in NZ (Lineham, 2014; Pratt, 2016; Ward, 2016). Whilst pluralisation and diversification of religion may be potential arguments for the decline in individuals self-identifying as Christian; these arguments do not adequately justify the rate of disaffiliation with Christianity among white/Pākehā New Zealanders 20 to 30 years old.

As indicated above, significant changes in the religiosity of NZ society have occurred, particularly within those aged 20 to 30 years old, young adults, but an analysis of academic scholarship reveals that

research has yet to capture this decline, to date, specifically research exploring reasons young adults are changing their religious identity. Contemporary research exploring this occurrence is required to enhance our understanding of the role religion plays in day-to-day negotiations and attitudes towards pressing social justice issues. During the past 30 years of intellectual neglect in the field of the sociology of religion, incredible societal change has occurred both nationally and internationally including more accessible information via the internet, technology changes, increased academic knowledge and a growing interconnectedness of social movements, all of which can be assumed to have had a significant impact on religious societies internationally. It is important to interrogate how technological advances, growing diversity, access to information and participation in social movements may have affected individuals coming of age during this time and subsequently ascertain how such engagements influence individuals understanding of religion and religion affiliation.

From a sociological perspective, the limited attention devoted to religion since the turn of the millennium has narrowly focused on concepts of spirituality and secularism of the nation (Cook, 2016; Hoverd & Sibley, 2010; N. Smith, 2013). The majority of research conducted internationally has focused on macro-societal correlations between religiosity and data points such as level of education, the religiosity of parents, divorce rates, higher education, and substance use (Mayrl & Uecker, 2011; Regnerus & Uecker, 2007; Schwadel, 2015, 2017; Uecker et al., 2007; Uecker & Ellison, 2012; Uecker & Froese, 2019). A few researchers have employed qualitative approaches to advance theories or arguments for correlations between disaffiliation with religion and intellectual conflict, network effect, cognitive dissonance, and moralistic views on LGBTQ communities and sexual activity (Chase, 2013; Ross, 2009; Schaffner, 2017; Vaughn, 2016; Wagstaff, 2004). Arguments in favour of and against secularism and secularisation theory as a reason for the increasing disaffiliation with Christianity for New Zealanders features significantly within the available literature written from a NZ context; however, little research

has been completed, nationally and internationally, considering an individual's personal reasons for disaffiliating with Christianity on a micro-level. There is little evidence examining the reasons why persons may no longer identify with a religion, specifically Christianity, or have experienced a substantial change in how they identify with Christianity.

Religion is a social category or marker that carries power and status relationships according to social identity theory; religion, therefore, remains of great interests deserving special attention in relation to changing religious attitudes among white/pākehā, young adults (Greenfield & Marks, 2007). The purpose of this research is to explore and begin to provide possible explanations as to why NZ white/pākehā young adults have a declining affiliation with Christianity or have experienced a substantial change in their belief system or identification with faith.

State of the Nation – New Zealand Census Data on Religion

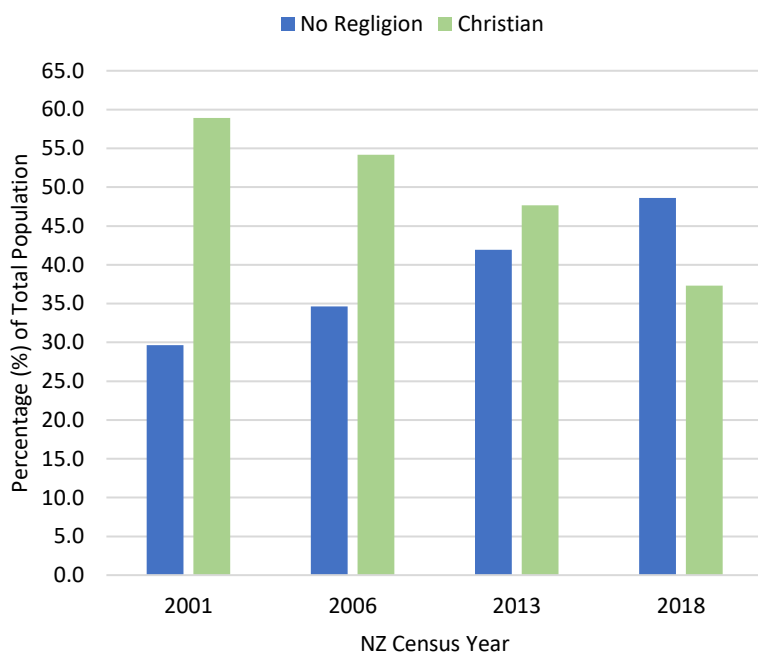
This section provides a brief overview of trends regarding the proportions of New Zealanders who identify with Christianity. Particular attention is devoted to illustrating how these trends have changed over time. Statistics New Zealand has census data available from 1871. European New Zealanders only were surveyed, with reportedly 93% of the European population identifying with Christianity (Statistics New Zealand, 1871). Religious data was collected in a consistent fashion from 2001 onwards, the following is a presentation of the religiosity trends within NZ between 2001 to 2018.

Declining Affiliation with Christianity

Christianity has historically been the highest reported religion that New Zealanders have self-identified. The 2001 census reported approximately 58% of respondents identifying as Christian (Statistics New Zealand, 2019a). The NZ census data from 2001 to 2018 demonstrated several significant religious identification trends among New Zealanders (Statistics New Zealand, 2019a). The key trend is demonstrated in figure one, which is a comparison of the rates of respondents reporting no religion, compared with identification as Christian (Statistics New Zealand, 2019a).

Figure 1

Percentage of NZ Census Respondents from the 2001-2018 Census that Identified with No Religion versus Christian.



Data sourced from Statistics NZ (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b).

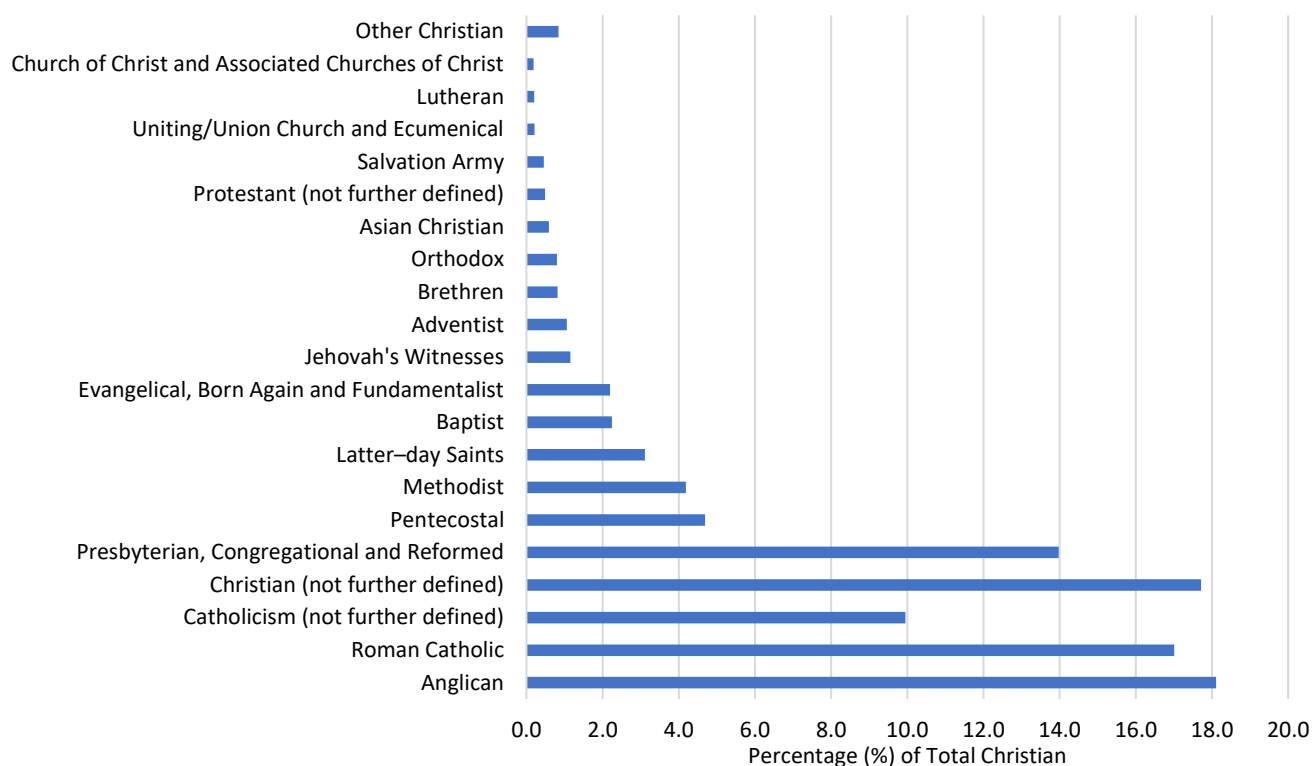
From 2001 to 2019, the number of New Zealanders reporting no religion has been steadily increasing, from 29% in 2001 to 48% in 2018 (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b). This increase parallels with the downward trend in the number persons self-identifying as Christian (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b). In 2013, there was only a 6% difference between the two groups. The 2018 census data demonstrates the largest cultural shift, with 48% of New Zealanders reporting no religion versus 37% reporting to be Christian (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b). This is the first time in NZ history that non-religious peoples outnumber those identifying as Christian – thus, the argument could be made that those that previously identified as Christian are becoming less religious or changing their religious identity leading to the rising numbers of non-religious persons in NZ. These trends are a strong indication that NZ is becoming a more secular society; however, there is little documented evidence or academic scholarship exploring the reasons why individuals are no longer identifying with religion or are changing their religious identity.

Denominational Breakdown of Reported Christians

The population of those that self-identify as Christian can be further stratified into denominational sub-groups, as shown in figure two, displaying data from the 2018 census (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b). In the 2018 data set, Anglicanism is misrepresented as appearing to hold the largest proportion of the Christian population, this is due to statistics NZ changing the denomination choices within the census to divide the Catholic population into Catholic, not further defined, and Roman Catholic, whose combined proportion would be 27%.

Figure 2

Percentage of Total Christian Respondents from the 2018 NZ Census that Identified with a particular Denomination.



Data sourced from (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b)

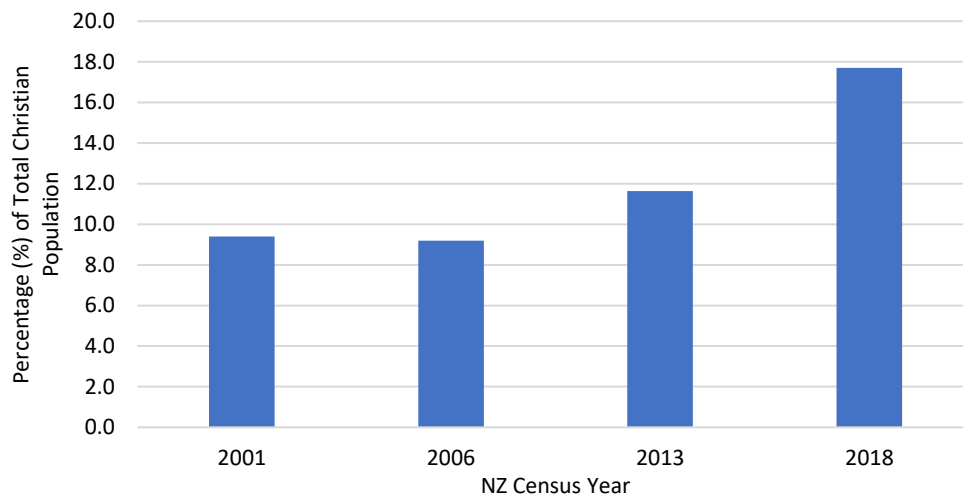
Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians

Christian denominations, other than Anglicanism and Catholicism, reflect a relatively small proportion of the total Christian population. Interestingly, as seen in figure three, the proportion of persons identifying with “Christian, not further defined” increases across subsequent data collection points. Census reports have failed to capture the changing rates of individual denominations such as the Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic (EPC) churches and non-denominational churches – as these individuals fall within the collective category of “Christian not further defined (NFD)” (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b)

The concept of an evangelical Christian/church is considered elusive and trans-denominational (Liu, 2011). An individual that describes themselves as an evangelical Christian holds the general belief that the bible is the infallible word of God and has the final authority, they also believe that Jesus, Son of God, 'saves' individuals that 'repent and follow him' from 'hell' and 'believers' should have an underlining drive and desire to convert non-believers (Liu, 2011; Ross, 2009). Evangelicals will also typically hold strong conservative views on moral issues such as; marriage is between one man and one woman, against the legalization of abortion, and other similar moral perspectives (Nooney, 2006; Ross, 2009). The concept of an evangelical and Pentecostal Christian is often intertwined within the faith of an individual, i.e., one would likely identify as both (Liu, 2011). A Pentecostal Christian holds all of the afore mention beliefs but also acknowledges that the Holy Spirit is 'active' and 'intervenes' in human life 'supernaturally'; typically associated with supernatural physical healing and prophetic words (Liu, 2011). Since the late 1980s, American evangelical mega church culture has become increasingly adopted in NZ, of which, central to this movement is the emphasis on a prosperity gospel and a church cultural method that references current/modern music and production(Alan Jamieson, n.d.; Bond, 2008; Lineham, 2014; Malloy, 2017).

Figure 3

Percentage of Total Christian NZ Census Respondents from 2001 to 2018 that identified as Christian – not



further defined.

Data sourced from (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b).

Internationally EPC and non-denominational churches have become a more popular place of practicing the Christian faith, nationally, on an ad hoc basis. This trend is also thought to be replicated in NZ; however, due to the limitations within the census data collected, it is not possible to identify this trend statistically, rather it is inferred within the rising proportions of “Christian not further defined” as shown in figure three (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b). The original intention of this research was to examine the reasons behind EPC young adult Christians changing their religious identity; this was broadened to all Christians, as the lack of specific EPC data resulted in the inability to assess identification trends within this population.

Ethnicity

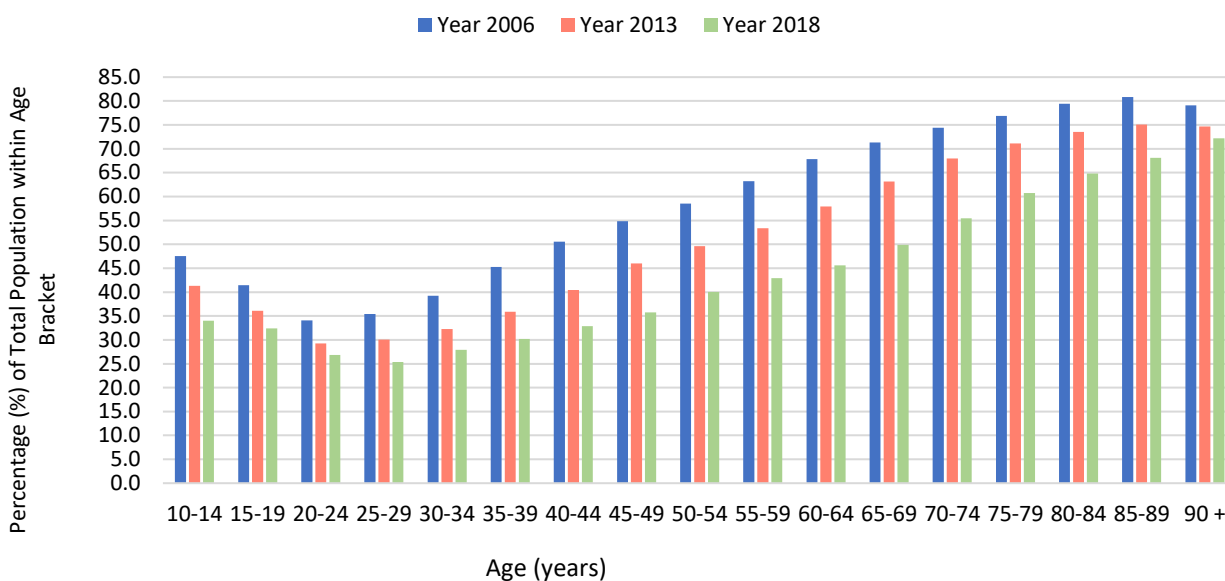
The proportions of those identifying with Christianity or no religion were not dissimilar when stratifying NZ census data according to ethnicity, particularly European/Pākehā versus Māori (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b). The primary difference across all religions was that Pākehā engaged with Indigenous religions at a lower rate than Māori (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b).

Religion Data Stratified by Age

An age-related cultural shift away from religion is also seen upon stratifying the NZ 2006 to 2018 census data by age (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b). Consistently, within each age bracket, the proportion of persons self-identifying with Christianity decreases, and those specifying no religion increases from the 2006 to the 2018 NZ census, as seen in figures four and five (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b). The relationship between persons identifying with no religion is inversely proportional to age, with respondents aged 20 to 24 years consistently reporting the highest rates of identifying with no religion, followed closely by those aged 25 to 30 years (Statistics New Zealand, 2019). The sharp statistical shift away from Christianity towards no religion, particularly in the 20 to 30-year age bracket, was the basis for selecting this age bracket for the purposes of this research.

Figure 4

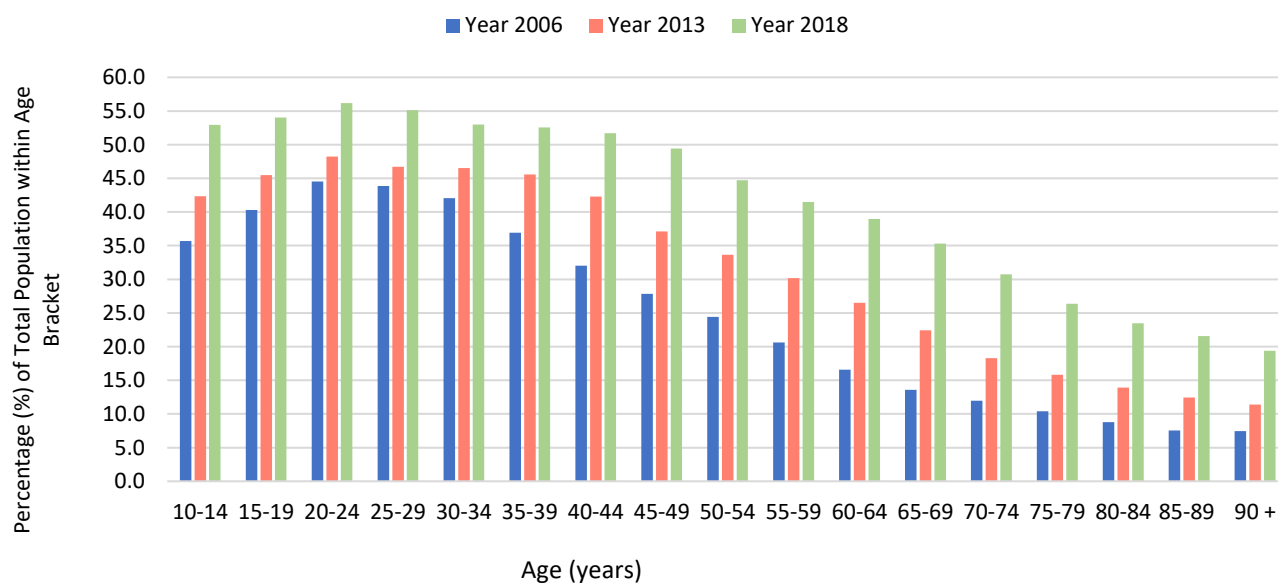
Percentage of NZ Census Respondents from 2006 to 2018 that Identified as Christian, Stratified by Age.



Data sourced from (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b)

Figure 5

Percentage of NZ Census Respondents from 2006 to 2018 that Identified with No Religion, Stratified by Age.

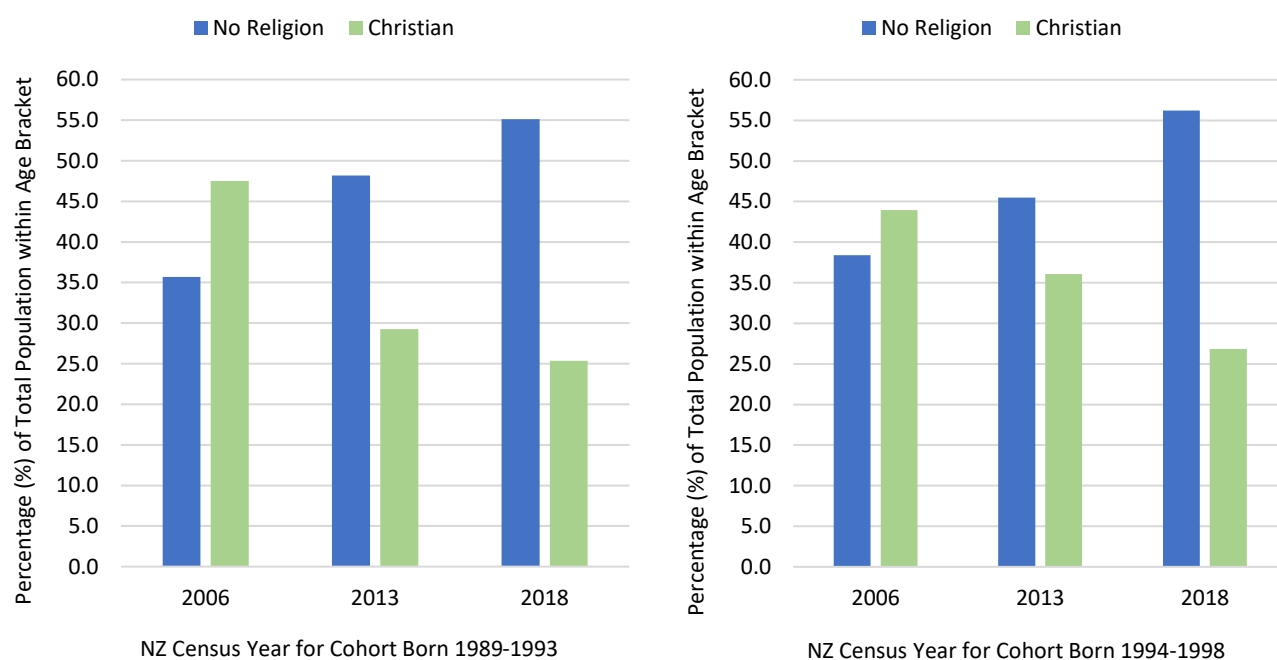


Data sourced from (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b)

As shown in figure six, respondents within the NZ census cohorts born between 1989 to 1993 and 1994 to 1998 fall within the ages 20-30. Figure six demonstrates that as the age of the cohort increases, their disaffiliation with Christianity towards no religion increases (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b). In the 2018 census, the majority of respondents within this age cohort aged 20 to 30 years, roughly 55%, reported no religion(Statistics New Zealand, 2019b). Figure four indicates that a proportion of those aged 20 to 29 years do re-engage within Christianity from the age of 30; however, successive censuses have demonstrated that this proportion is decreasing – there is a gap in the academic scholarship which examines the reasons why this proportion of young adults returning to Christianity is decreasing.

Figure 6

Percentage of NZ Census Respondents born within cohorts 1989-1993-left, and 1994-1998, right, from 2006 to 2018 Census' that Identified with No Religion versus Christian.



Data sourced from (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b)

The general population trend of disaffiliation with Christianity was identified by NZ historian Peter Lineham in the 1960s, with the post-World War Two generation "opting out of church" and church membership numbers beginning to decline (Lineham, 2014; Ward, 2016). Although this decline in identifying as Christian has been previously reported, there exists a gap in the literature that seeks to explain this decline, particularly among white/Pākehā persons between 20 to 30 years of age (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b; Ward, 2016).

The introduction of Christianity into NZ was a product of colonisation and immigration from European countries; however, "NZ does not have a reputation as a particularly religious country. Founded

after the days when religion was a necessity for state construction, it was constituted on a very different basis than earlier colonies as far as church-state relations were concerned" (Lineham, 2014, p. 333). At the point of signing the Treaty of Waitangi 1840, there was no established church in NZ which significantly impacted on the separation of church and state, comments made by the NZ Government in 2007 state that NZ has "no official or established religion" (Cooke, 2010; Dakin, 2007). Although there is evidence of Christian strong holds within the history of NZ society and politics, there was a considerable separation of church and state comparatively to other nations of the time, where rulership was intertwined with religious institutions (Cooke, 2010; Dakin, 2007; Lineham, 2014). The alternate to a religious society is the concept of a secular society, a society and its function of government that is not connected with religious or spiritual matters.

New Zealand is a secular society regarding functions of government; the church and religious clergy have no power in setting the law or rules that govern NZ society, nor are laws based upon religious authority (Ahdar et al., 2000). This is regardless of the majority of New Zealanders till 2006, self-identifying as Christian (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b). The society of NZ, although considerably secular in its infancy, throughout its short history, has moved away from a partially religious to a more secular society.

Research Question

Analysis of religious data from the NZ census from 2001 to 2018 has identified that the proportion of New Zealanders self-identifying with Christianity is declining, particularly with regard to those aged 20 to 30 years. There has been considerable scholarship regarding the history of religion in NZ, and authors have also provided commentary on religion within NZ; however, in the last two decades, very little academic scholarship has focused on white/Pākehā experiences, particularly regarding young adults.

The primary purpose of this research is to gain insight into the factors influencing the decline in religious identity/affiliation with Christianity among white/Pākehā New Zealand young adults aged 20 to 30 years. Secondary research questions, created with the intention of gaining greater insight into the primary purpose of this research included:

- What role have Christian values, beliefs, rules, and traditions played in an individual's disaffiliation with Christianity?
- Did participants experience a contradiction between the values, beliefs, rules, and traditions taught to them throughout childhood and their subsequent life experiences? Did this contradiction influence an individual's change in religious identity or disaffiliation with Christianity?

Whilst acknowledging that ethnicity impacts engagement with religion, particularly Christianity, the parameters of this research is the population of white/Pākehā New Zealanders and excludes evaluating the intersection between one's faith and ethnicity outside of this population group.

This writing proceeds by firstly reviewing the available scholarship regarding the historical context of Christianity in NZ and factors previously investigated internationally that a disaffiliation with Christianity could be attributed. A description of the methods and presentation of the data obtained in this research is then discussed and followed by final arguments and conclusions.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The following chapter is a thematic review of the available literature to establish the current evidence examining the reasons why young adults within NZ are losing or experiencing a significant change to their faith, specifically Christianity. In order to do so, it is important to understand how religion, specifically with regard to Christianity, is conceptualised and discussed within a New Zealand context. As stated earlier, much of the academic research related to religion comes from the US. While there is some overlap regarding the way Christianity emerged in a settler-colonial context and its influence on state policy; however, there are some significant differences most notable is the trend in declining attitudes toward religion since the 1960s in New Zealand (Ward, 2016). This study acknowledges that among certain racial/ethnic/migrant populations, religion remains a significant part of culture and identity that is comparable to the US (Nooney, 2006; Pearce et al., 2019; C. Smith et al., 2002). At a national level, the decline in religion has been captured by the national census and in some regard in NZ academic scholarship evidenced by decreased attention. This chapter presents a summary of literature, factors previously identified as contributing to disaffiliation with religion, with a particular focus on scholarship published during the last two decades.

Literature Review Methodology

It is important to note that the presence of relevant research undertaken in the New Zealand context, particularly from a sociological perspective, is lacking. Thus any relevant writings, regardless of the perspective, pertaining to religion or Christianity in New Zealand were reviewed. Because the breadth of writings on religion in the US context from a sociological perspective is much wider, the evidence reviewed below is largely from the American context. Research pertaining to the declining faith or religiosity among millennials was a key focus in the US, and key findings serve as a foundation to help

frame this study. The content of the obtained literature has been thematically reviewed and summarised below. What is clearly apparent is the lack of research examining explanations as to why individual young adults, in the New Zealand context, are losing or having a radical change in their faith, particularly regarding Christianity.

Historical Context of Christianity in New Zealand

Christianity Introduced by Missionaries

The documented religious history of NZ, the introduction and propagation of Christianity by the missionaries, has primarily been told “from the perspective of the missionaries, for they were the ones who wrote letters and recorded” events, thus writings have often reflected “Eurocentric and ethnocentric interpretations of the missionary dynamics”, leading to a one sided interpretation of mission history in NZ (Davidson, 1991, p. 7; Troughton & Hugh, 2011). With the arrival of the European missionaries “it is to be assumed that Maori leaders within the various Whare Wānanga throughout Aotearoa discussed the new religion, but their reflection has been lost” and as a result, “there is very little published Maori indigenous theological reflections, by Maori, that could be described as explicit” (Tate, 2012, p. 2015). The number of publications undertaking a historical review of religion in NZ increased between 1980 and 2010, but “with growth (of publications), however, comes the danger of an accumulated mass of unconnected bits and pieces; multiple religious histories that are all legitimate but yet often strangely disconnected”, thus obtaining a history that considers the viewpoint or lens of all parties is difficult to obtain (Troughton & Hugh, 2011, p. 18).

Christianity was introduced to NZ by Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionaries in 1814; in retrospect, the involvement of missionaries in NZ is often perceived as the first step of colonisation by the

British Crown. In fact, so called Christian conversion is an inherent feature of colonisation “variously described as an enticing yet simplistic sequence along the lines of....missionary, resident, regiment” (Davidson, 1991; Lineham, 2014; Tate, 2012; Troughton & Hugh, 2011, p. 83)

When the CMS originally sent William Hall and John King, under the leadership of Samuel Marsden, “it stated that the only object they had was to introduce the knowledge of Christ amongst the natives” but in doing this “missionaries were expected to undermine the prejudices and superstitions of the heathen”; thus the “declared missionary objectives were many; to bring Christianity, to civilise, to undermine heathen ways and beliefs, to promote British economic interests, settlement and political control” (Davidson, 1991; Lineham, 2014; Nichol & Veitch, 1983, pp. 18, 20). Whilst some historians acknowledge the peaceful intentions of the missionaries, ultimately the intention to undermine the Māori belief system and culture is a dark shadow in NZ’s history, with long reaching consequences (Davidson, 1991; Nichol & Veitch, 1983).

Ruatara, chief of Ngaapuhi iwi, meet and spent time with Samuel Marsden, 1809, during his time spent in Australia, prior to leaving and returning to NZ he requested that Marsden send a teacher to NZ to teach “the children to read and write,” this request led to the early settlement in 1814 of the CMS missionaries and settlers in Rangihoua (Jones & Jenkins, 2011; O’Malley, 2012). In the request for a teacher “Māori sought European allies who were willing to teach and to learn, to the extent that they would enable Māori access to modern trade” rather than for the proliferation of religious ideas (Jones & Jenkins, 2011). The missionaries believed that if Māori were engaged in writing and reading scripture, Māori would convert to Christianity; however, to the dismay of early missionary John King, this outcome did not eventuate, but mutual respectful relationships were maintained (Jones & Jenkins, 2011).

Missionaries that sought to convert Māori to Christianity experienced varying success, and “research points to the critical role of tribal leadership in encouraging or undermining its expansion” (Jones & Jenkins, 2011; Lineham, 2014, p. 335). Historical research is now exploring that Māori held “aspirations for peace, desire for access to Western technology” and to obtain Western cultural and intellectual knowledge, and thus saw religion, engagement with the missionaries and Christianity as a method in which to obtain this information, leading to a rapid adoption of Christianity superficially (Jones & Jenkins, 2011; Lineham, 2014, p. 334; Owens, 2011).

During the early settlement of missionaries from 1814 to 1840, the missionaries were key in acting as intermediaries between Māori and European peoples or communities, often mediating between the two parties (Davidson, 1991; Lineham, 2014; O’Malley, 2012; Tate, 2012). In 1830, missionaries from other denominations, Wesleyan Methodist, arrived in NZ with the purpose to evangelize and convert, settlers, and Māori people (Davidson, 1991; Lineham, 2014; Tate, 2012).

Locational Denomination

The book entitled "The Fixed and the Fickle" details religiosity in New Zealand, highlights, for Europeans, the denomination of Christianity that one was likely to associate with, was largely dependent on where that person lived, as missionaries from different denominations tended to base themselves in different locations (Davidson, 1991; Mol, 1922). Except for the Methodists, other major denominations settled with immigrants of which nation they came (Mol, 1922). The English brought Anglicanism and settled in Christchurch and Auckland, the Irish brought Roman Catholicism and settled in the West Coast of the South Island, and the Scottish brought Presbyterianism and settled in the lower South Island (Mol, 1922).

Influence of the New Zealand Land Wars on Missionary Involvement

The signing of the Treaty of Waitangi on February 6th, 1840, and subsequently Britain's assumption of sovereignty, led to the arrival and introduction of the British government into NZ society (Dakin, 2007; Davidson, 1991; Lineham, 2014). At the signing of the Treaty, there was no established church within NZ, nor was religion referenced in the Treaty terms, and the 'church and state' were to be kept separate upon the establishment of British annexation in NZ (Cooke, 2010; Dakin, 2007; Davidson, 1991; Lineham, 2014). The continued workings of the Christian missionaries began to decline, due to their limited influence upon the governing body (Davidson, 1991; Lineham, 2014). The Māori were "quick to appraise the limited influence of the missionaries" and the respect for the missionaries position declined further when "Governor Sir George Grey criticised missionary landholdings" (Lineham, 2014, p 335). The missionaries' place within Māori society was complicated by the NZ Wars in 1860, which created a conflict crisis between missionary and Māori churches (Davidson, 1991; Lineham, 2014). Prominent Māori Christians, Wiremu Tamihana, supported the rising Kingitanga movement in response to the increasing restrictions the British government were placing on the Māori people, whereas European church leaders were opposed the establishment of a Māori King (Lineham, 2014). The missionaries to the Māori people were uncomfortable with the "assertions of Māori sovereignty;" but recognised that the European church leader opposition was based upon "settlers' greed for land" (Lineham, 2014).

As the NZ Land Wars developed, missionaries withdrew from conflict 'hotspots' such as the Central North Island (Davidson, 1991; Lineham, 2014). The absence of the missionaries' presence created an environment in which indigenous religious movements could develop and expand (Davidson, 1991; Lineham, 2014; Tate, 2012). During the 1880s Anglicanism remained popular in the East within the Ngāti Porou iwi, whilst Mormon missionaries began to gain popularity in other areas of the North Island (Lineham, 2014). Although the Christian missionaries did 'convert' several Māori to Christianity, they were

not wholly successful, and today Māori are not considered, in the Western sense, to be unanimously Christian (Lineham, 2014).

The Ratana Movement and Political Engagement

A new Māori, Christian, religious movement gained momentum in the 1920s led by T.W. Ratana. This new movement formed a marriage between practicing religion and achieving political reform, after a political campaign the Ratana movement ‘captured’ the four Māori seats within Parliament – achieving a political status that sparked interest in the Labour Party of the time (Davidson, 1991; Lineham, 2014; Tate, 2012). This foreshadowed a reasonable role over the next 60 years that members of the Church would play within politics, originally in the 19th century religious men, across multiple denominations, had held important political positions (Lineham, 2014). The leader T.W.Ratana, paved way particularly within the Labour Party, who although had strong anti-church sentiments within the caucus, also had a strong Christian socialist sect within the ranks, this was later supported also by the Catholic Church (Lineham, 2014). In the early 20th century, the ecumenical Protestant group were closely connected with the liberal political ideas and social reform proposed during that time, interestingly the group was happy to work with secular reformers to achieve their ‘vision’ (Davidson, 1991; Lineham, 2014).

With the success of the Ratana movement, it became apparent that churches of the time were required to consider how the church structure would account for the aspirations of their Māori parishioners (Lineham, 2014). In response to these aspirations, in 1928 the Anglican movement appointed a Māori Anglican Bishop of Aotearoa, Frederick Bennett; however, at the time no diocesan authority was given to the position (Davidson, 1991; Lineham, 2014) The creation of this position also created a structure within the Anglican church that Māori could engage with and potentially “climb the ranks” within. By the

1970s, most denominations had made changes to their respective constitutions that allowed more independence to their Maori members (Lineham, 2014). Of the mainstream denominations, the Anglican church leads this charge; however, in more recent times, Pentecostal churches including the Apostolic and Destiny Church movements have proved to be highly effective among Māori (Lineham, 2014; Moetara, 2012).

Post World-War One Generations and Religious Decline

Following World War I, in the 1930s depression era, a proportion of Christians began to identify with a “more radical view of social justice and peace”, these took the form of pacifism and the provision of economic welfare (Davidson, 1991; Lineham, 2014). In this period “Christians contributed to a general shift in societal attitudes which made.... socialist ideas more acceptable” (Davidson, 1991, p.110). The 1930s, between World War I and II, foreshadowed the recognised start of the religious decline within NZ in the 1960s (Cooke, 2010; Lineham, 2014; Ward, 2016). The post-world-war generations opted out of church and the culture associated with it; as a result, the collective church began to lose their previously held positions as the moral leaders of the local community. The 1960s also introduced diversification within Christian denominations among white/Pākehā attendees (Davidson, 1991; Lineham, 2014). Of note was the introduction of the charismatic movement, which in turn became increasingly popular. Its popularity; however, was not adequate to replace the declining numbers within larger denominations such as Anglicanism (Lineham, 2014). Although NZ was historically a secular society, due to the shift in the religious identification of New Zealanders and the ageing membership, former majority stakeholders within the Protestant movement that had a minor degree of influence politically no longer had the “right to speak to governments on behalf of the moral majority” (Davidson, 1991; Lineham, 2014).

The 1960s and Two Styles of Christianity - Liberal and Evangelical

The 1960s saw the development of two distinct and different styles of Protestant Christianity emerged, largely influenced by international churches, liberal and evangelical (Lineham, 2014; Bryant, 1986). The liberal movement stemmed from the post-war generation that felt the church needed a transformational change including, liberalisation of the 'church doctrine and ethical standards' (Davidson, 1991; Lineham, 2014). This liberalisation had been foreshadowed by the ecumenical Protestant church's involvement in politics mentioned earlier (Lineham, 2014). The evangelical movement, as previously defined, held more conservative moral views which were fiercely defended with new methods of church practice (Lineham, 2014). In particular, the 'new evangelicals' held the strong view that to spread the 'good news' the most effective way to achieve this was through engagement in secular culture (Ross, 2009). The churches of N.Z. were caught between the two movements and the intense debate that ensued, but eventually the liberal group 'lost ground to the evangelicals' (Lineham, 2014). The 'liberal religious tradition' gradually declined with the introduction of evangelical style, which also resulted in a changed in political engagement from the liberal sect of Christians in that period (Lineham, 2014).

The 1960s and the Changing Cultural Picture

Another factor of influence that began in the 1960s decade, was the changing cultural make up of N.Z. society, which was led by changes in the migration policy (Lineham, 2014). People of the Pacific came to N.Z. to 'provide larger manual labour' and with them either brought the missionary style of church from their home communities or assimilated into local more traditional denominations such as Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian (Lineham, 2014). The second phase of migration in the 1980s saw the introduction of, particularly in Auckland, South and East Asians, some of which brought their own religions or Christian churches (Lineham, 2014). The previously 60 years, with the help of immigration, have seen

an increased in the number of ethnic Christian churches and alternate religions that have been introduced into the religious landscape of NZ.

From the 1980s onwards, NZ has seen a rise in the number of evangelical styled churches, although some parishes may not identify as such. Evidence of the evangelical styled church has been present across denominations and prompted non-denominational churches. The American Mega Church and Prosperity Gospel have influenced the style of Christianity found in NZ today (Alan Jamieson, n.d.).

New Zealand; a Secular versus Religious Society

Research done by McCrindle declared that New Zealand was an increasingly secular nation, justifying this claim by pointing to data indicating that more people are no longer identifying with Christianity (McCrindle,2014). Here McCrindle is not relying on the interaction or lack of religion and the state but rather claiming that to be secular is based on the number that claim to be a part of religion versus those that do not.

Secularization Theory

The concept of secularisation theory has been hinted at throughout sociological history by Max Weber; however this was used lightly without much explanation (Swatos & Christiano, 1999). Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Max Webber, and Emile Durkheim all postulated that modernization within society would likely result in declining rates of religiosity, this in turn has influenced the concept of secularisation theory. Secularisation theory is the idea that as societies transform, progress, become enlightened or through rationalism, society will naturally move away from its religious values and religious institutions (McGivern, 2014; Swatos & Christiano, 1999). This process has been described in the historical context, in which states

can be seen to be moving away from their religious attachments' control and authority, as "the churches lost cultural and intellectual power," in favour of being bound by democracy, law and science (Ahdar, 2013; Repphun, 2009; Swatos & Christiano, 1999). Moral issues, rather than being decided upon by the church and clergy, are now resolved by the determination of new 'societal norms', this influence of the media and process of legislation.

Secularisation theory is not widely accepted by all and still the subject of academic debate. Peter Berger, once a proponent of the theory, is now an opposer arguing that if secularisation is linked with modernisation of society, then communities that have modernised at similar rates, should see similar rates of secularisation; however, this is not the case, especially when comparing European religiosity rates to American rates (Swatos & Christiano, 1999; Woodhead et al., 2013). While declining rates of religiosity can be seen widely in western societies this does not mean that it cannot be found or does not play a significant role for many people in the western populations (McGivern, 2014). Similarly, Repphun (2009) argues that "European patterns of decline are today the exception rather than the rule", as "religion in many other parts of the world has maintained its role in culture and in some cases seen rapid growth in the modern era" (Repphun, 2009, p. 34). Pluralization and diversification are the biggest arguments against secularization theory; however, the focus on this study is the decline of Christianity in NZ among young white adults, a decline in which pluralization and diversification do not adequately explain the reason for this substantial decline in New Zealand. Whilst there is intellectual disagreement regarding the influence of the secularisation of society on societal engagement with religion, the literature fails to address whether secularisation, particularly functions of state, and the impact of the changing values within a community's laws and regulations, in turn, affects the affiliation with religion, particularly Christianity, amongst NZ young adults.

Declining Rate of Christianity

The literature indicates declining rates of Christianity in the western world, Ward, a NZ author, goes further to say that the declining rates seen in NZ are mirrored in other nations such as Europe and the America (Ward, 2016). The declining rates of Christianity are clearly interpretable in the NZ census data, and this trend is not argued within literature in the context of NZ (Lineham, 2014; Troughton et al., 2014; Ward, 2006, 2016). There is little argument within the literature that America is experiencing a similar decline in affiliation with Christianity, especially amongst young adults; however, there is a dearth of attributing reasons for this decline (Chase, 2013; Edgell, n.d.; Hill, 2008; Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2011; Owens, 2011; Puffer, 2018; Regnerus & Uecker, 2006, 2007; Uecker et al., 2007; Vaughn, 2016).

Spirituality and Personal Religion

The 2006 to 2018 NZ census inaccurately describes NZ as a non-spiritual country based upon the low “spiritual” rates, the census fails to recognize or understand the growing difference between being spiritual and identifying with a specific religion or as spiritual (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b). In western nations, surveys have indicated a strong association with people defining themselves as ‘spiritual’, preferring this term over being described as ‘religious’ (Repphun, 2009). However, it is difficult to provide comparisons across the literature or between differing datasets due to the number of different definitions and understandings of spiritual and spirituality, highlighting the confusing nature of such a term. “Spirituality is often understood to be an individual and personal response to the sacred, whilst religion refers to the institutional or communal aspects relating to the search for the sacred” (Donaldson, 2016, p7). The individual and authentic associations with spirituality lead to a positive perception by society, when compared with the negative connotation of religion, which “is judged as ritualistic and impersonal” (Ammerman, 2013; Gall et al., 2011). This concept of positive and negative associations “may reflect the

Western shift towards secularism in the twentieth century, and an increase in popularity of the idea that spirituality can be unfettered from institutional constraints (Donaldson, 2016, p. 7).

Individual or personal definitions of spirituality and how one relates to it, creates further diversity in its meaning and the use of the term. Spirituality for some can be intertwined with their faith and religious identification, whilst others may use spirituality to separate themselves from Christianity and religion, noting a belief or connection to 'something'. The use of the term and corresponding meaning is as individual and personal as one's beliefs and identification with religion (Donaldson, 2016; Long, 2020.).

To use the imagery of a continuum of religion and secularism at opposite ends, spirituality sits outside of this continuum and "is a disruptive category, because its semantic resonances locate it within as well as alongside religion and the secular" (Long, 2020, p. 3). An individual could identify as religious, be strongly connected to institutions or churches, whilst also identifying as a spiritual being through their engagements with religious activities. Conversely, one could also be associated with religious activities, describe themselves as secular whilst also describing or identifying as spiritual connection to nature, the cosmos, music, connection to a soul of another or animal. The "notion of spirituality breaks down the limitations of the religious-secular binary and emphasizes how the three terms work together dynamically" (Edgell, n.d.; Long, 2020, p. 5).

The following component of this literature review examines the academic scholarship for factors that affect individual religiosity, particularly for young adults where literature is available.

Home Life and Home Socialization

Several researchers have proposed a connection and/or correlation between difference aspects of experience within an individual's 'homelife' and their religious outcomes as a young adult (Edgell, n.d.; Hill, 2008; Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2011; Long, 2020; Nooney, 2006; Schaffner, 2017; Schulze, 2012; Schwadel, 2017; Uecker & Ellison, 2012). Uecker & Ellison pooled quantitative data from the General Social Surveys (GSS) in America to investigate the relationship between parent separation rates and the loss of one's religion (Uecker & Ellison, 2012). Researchers have also investigated how; good or bad religious experiences during childhood religious attendance, attendance rates of parents at church gatherings or services, or poor parental relations have impacted on a child's identification with religion at a later age (Nooney, 2006; Schaffner, 2017; Schwadel, 2017).

These approaches consider the epidemiological rate or proportion of persons who identify with a religion and assess reasons for the changing rate of identification of religion on a macro-level. Whilst this data is important to build a national understanding regarding macro correlations between childhood events and outcomes on religiosity later in life, it fails to go a step further and consider the micro reasons for the impact of these 'homelife' events. The reviewed data does not seek to understand 'why' the individual child of separated parents changed their religious identification later in life, this is a limitation of only using quantitative data to investigate changing religious identification over an individual's lifetime.

A connection, within the American context, between a child's home socialization or homelife and their future religiosity is seen within the literature; however, this literature does not begin to assess the reasons 'why' a child's experiences affect their future affiliation. It is also not clear whether this translates into the New Zealand context, due to the lack of research undertaken in this location.

Influence of Higher Education

The influence or role of higher, post high school, education, upon an individual's identification with religion is a debated topic within the literature (Fisler et al., 2009; Hill, 2008; Mayrl & Uecker, 2011; Regnerus & Uecker, 2007; Schwadel, 2015, 2017; Uecker et al., 2007). The key argument, propagated by religious institutions, is that engagement with higher education leads young adults to disaffiliate with religion (Mayrl & Uecker, 2011; Schwadel, 2015; Uecker et al., 2007). Early research in America from the 1960's found that "those from elite colleges", preferred "academic careers" and thought of "themselves as intellectuals and political liberals (Nooney, 2006). College or university campus religious organisations anticipate that faith is challenged within higher education and thus often provide forums where students facing this intellectual challenge of religion can receive guidance and support (Regnerus & Uecker, 2007; Stacey, 2013).

The negative effect of higher education on religiosity is not necessarily supported in the wider literature, some writes argue that, within the American context, rates of dissociation with from religion among young adults are not significantly different when comparing young adults who engaged with higher education versus those that did not undertake further studies (Mayrl & Uecker, 2011; Regnerus & Uecker, 2007). Individuals who engage intellectually with progressive ideas and argued to be able to accommodate those new ideas into their existing belief system, rather than the ideas leading to the destruction of their world view (Regnerus & Uecker, 2007). It is proposed that those engaged with higher education have "edited" their belief system, rather than abandoning it all together, thus arguably their 'childlike' or adolescent faith/belief system has matured throughout their education journey (Mayrl & Uecker, 2011). Regardless of whether higher education changed disaffiliation with religion, the ideas one is exposed to, is seen to influence and affect students and their spiritual struggle (Fisler et al., 2009). The research available regarding this theme is largely conducted in America, this data may not be transferrable to NZ

young adults, the secularisation effect of higher education has not been specifically investigated from a macro or micro perspective within NZ

Parental Religiosity and Higher Education

Writer Schwadel (2017) argues that there is a correlation between an individual's parental religiosity and the secularising influence higher education has on future engagement with religion. Schwadel's (2017) conclusions were that individuals who had mainline, actively religious Protestant parents, that undertook higher education were more likely to become disaffiliated with religion than individuals with religiously unaffiliated parents (Schwadel, 2017). Individuals with religiously unaffiliated parents, that engaged with higher education, were more likely to become affiliated with religion; however, the weakness in this argument is that an individual originally disaffiliated with religion as a part of their childhood socialisation, is unlikely to be able to become further secularised (Schwadel, 2017).

A commonly held belief is that engagement with higher education creates an intellectual conflict with religious life, creating a secularising influence on young adults, another argument is that it is the network effect college life has on an individual rather than exposure to further learning that is likely to losing or changing an individual's identification with faith (Fisler et al., 2009; Stacey, 2013).

Network Effect on Religiosity

Comparative to the influence of young adult engagement with higher education, Uecker argues that it is the network effect that a young adult is exposed to once leaving high school or the childhood home that has the greatest effect on young adult disaffiliation with religion (Mayrl & Uecker, 2011; Regnerus et al., 2004). The network effect is described as the independent influence that an individual's

relationships with others have on their religiosity, and higher education can contribute to or reduce disaffiliation with religion (Mayrl & Uecker, 2011).

Uecker's research found that upon comparison, those that didn't engage with higher education after high school had a higher rate of religious disaffiliation than those that attended college or university (Mayrl & Uecker, 2011). This finding created the argument that it is an individual's network and the experiences that network provides, has the greatest influence on identifying with religion (Mayrl & Uecker, 2011). It was proposed that the support structures, such as religious, Christian or bible study groups, available to students on college or university campuses provided the individual with an element of network protection from disaffiliating with religion, when compared with businesses and workplaces that did not have the same access to those religious support networks (Mayrl & Uecker, 2011). Uecker acknowledges that when stratifying disaffiliation by the subject of higher education religiosity rates are different, for example, business economics and management studies generally will have a lower decline in affiliation with religion than those studying the humanities (Mayrl & Uecker, 2011). Interestingly, students that "are more concerned about economic production and financial success and less about morals and beliefs...may be less prone to grapple with issues central to their religious faith, or to enrol in the types of classes that might challenge that faith.... students who do major in fields (such as the social sciences and the humanities) are the most likely to diminish their religiosity" (Uecker et al., 2007, p. 1669). Maryrl and Uecker argued that although college and university students may lose their faith it was because of the relationship with and influence of those around them, rather than the education, received that led to this decision (Mayrl & Uecker, 2011).

Newfound Freedoms

Within the concept of network effect, the choices an individual makes regarding experiences within a social framework can also influence a young adult's affinity to a religion, regardless of which network these activities are experienced within (Dravitzki, 2015). Post-secondary school experiences for young adults pose many opportunities for additional freedom, which they may not have had access to in their teenage years with parental supervision (Dravitzki, 2015). This 'newfound' freedom gives opportunities for emerging young adults to disengage with activities, like going to church, which may have become uninteresting or may be devalued amongst their new or existing peers (Dravitzki, 2015; Mayrl & Uecker, 2011; C. Smith et al., 2002). A teenager or young adult that is overtly religious, typically find that their religiosity can be the "kiss of death" socially as noted in study by Smith and Denton (2005); thus, to maintain their position within social network the young adult may also begin to devalue the role religion has on their life (C. Smith et al., 2002). Young adults could become curious and motivated by friends to test these new freedoms or partake in new activities like drinking, recreational drug use and sex (Nooney, 2006; Regnerus & Uecker, 2007; Uecker et al., 2007). Activities which young adults coming from conservative EPC churches, and other like religious backgrounds, would put the individual at odds with the teaching in which they grew up with. It is the engagement in new activities, through a network effect, that may influence what leads many young adults to stop believing in the religion of their youth (Regnerus & Uecker, 2007).

The network effect is a broad concept describing the influence an individual's social circles and experiences can have on disaffiliation with religion (Mayrl & Uecker, 2011; Regnerus & Uecker, 2007). This concept can be considered in tandem or separately from the engagement with higher education, when assessing the secularisation of a young adult (Mayrl & Uecker, 2011; Regnerus & Uecker, 2007; Schaffner, 2017). The limitation of the network effect concept is that Uecker has drawn conclusions from trends

within population data but has not confirmed this hypothesis with further research or investigation. The breadth of literature available on the network effect is primarily from the American perspective; however, considering the secularisation of, and rates of disaffiliation with religion in NZ census data, as discussed above, it is likely that this concept is transferrable to the NZ context and may play a larger role in NZ young adults losing their faith, than American, due to the largely secular environment posed to young adults post high school. Research is required to support this hypothesis further and understand its importance for young adults in the NZ context.

Biblical & Theological Inconsistency

In a similar vein to intellectual conflict, biblical and theological inconsistencies were a reoccurring theme within the literature, as a reason why individuals were losing their faith (Chase, 2013; Nooney, 2006; Ross, 2009; Schaffner, 2017). The population studied within the literature were primarily individuals who grew up within fundamentalist, evangelical, EPC churches and households, which ultimately held the belief that the bible is authoritative, divinely inspired, and infallible word of God which should be interpreted literally, thus many individuals struggled to retain their faith when they questioned what they were taught in the bible (Chase, 2013; Nooney, 2006; Ross, 2009; Schaffner, 2017). Several different themes consistently appeared within the literature when asked what factors of the bible that individuals struggled with, these fell into the broad categories of; inconsistencies within the bible, biblical truths, perception of the influence of the bible and reactions experienced from questioning the bible (Chase, 2013; Nooney, 2006; Ross, 2009; Schaffner, 2017; Vaughn, 2016; Wagstaff, 2004). A group of individuals didn't necessarily go into detail regarding the complaints with the bible, but just questioned how people can believe in the "ridiculousness" of the bible (Wagstaff, 2004).

Individuals struggle to reconcile the number of inconsistencies within the bible to the idea that the bible held the infallible truth, during their period of reflection and investigation they also found the church unwilling to answer any questions regarding biblical fallibility and inconsistency (Nooney, 2006; Ross, 2009). This left persons with unreconcilable questions within their belief system that were largely ignored by their church support network. Regarding content of the bible “many participants commented on the archaic, confusing, and sometimes barbaric nature of the bible’s moral prescriptions” which also extended to the biblical representation of hell and the unbelievable nature of the miracles discussed within the bible (Ross, 2009, p. 122; Schaffner, 2017). The truth of the bible was consistently questioned, and previous Christians struggled to hold it as the absolute truth, particularly when the promises of the bible didn’t come true in their own lives or the lives of those around them (Ross, 2009).

The story of the origins of the bible, and the influence that man/humanity has had in shaping the content and structure of the bible, was a factor that reduced the bible’s influence and called into question the ‘divinely inspired’ belief of the bible (Chase, 2013; Nooney, 2006; Ross, 2009). Furthermore, many commented that the number of bible translations available carried differing interpretation and meanings therefore if the bible held the absolute truth, how could there be so many different interpretations (Ross, 2009). Participants were also unable to reconcile the parallels between the bible, other holy books, and other mythologies (Nooney, 2006; Ross, 2009). When critically examining these questions, individuals struggle to reconcile their teachings of the bible with the similarities to other faiths, how could the bible hold the absolute truth when it shared many similarities to other religions? The result of the questioning and critically examining the bible was that individuals concluded that God did not inspire the bible, and thus was an important factor in the journey that led to individuals disaffiliating with Christianity (Chase, 2013).

The literature stated that the bible was not found to be a helpful resource for those studied and furthermore the argument explored that the bible, and how it portrays certain moral issues or ideals, was harmful for many individuals and the entirety of society (Chase, 2013; Ross, 2009). The literature also reflected that many disaffiliated Christians struggled to believe that the bible held infallible truth, and this was often in conflict with the beliefs held within their childhood churches and homes. The inability to discuss these biblical inconsistencies within their Christian support network meant that individuals were unable to reconcile their doubts with their belief system, the influence of the bible of youth adults losing their faith in the N.Z. context been investigated and is a gap within the available literature (Ross, 2009; Vaughn, 2016)

Christianity and Science; Relationship and Influence

The academic scholarship has found that scientific conflict is a key reason why individuals no longer self-identify as Christian and began to question their faith or belief system (Fisler et al., 2009; Ross, 2009; Schaffner, 2017). Individuals were often found to feel doubtful at the beginning of their learning of scientific concepts, but usually found with further exploration the belief in God became “increasingly incompatible with a scientific understanding of the world” (Ross, 2009, p. 61). A historical outline of the interactions between and an analysis of the developing relationship between Christianity and scientific thought is beyond the scope of this research. It is important, however, to recognise the role that the perceived dogmatic conflict between Christianity and science may have on the retention of faith in NZ young adults. Pew Research Centre investigated the American perceived conflict between science and religion, with 59% of Americans stating that science is often in conflict with religion, this proportion rises to 76% when stratified by those not affiliated with religious tradition (*Pew Research Center*, n.d.).

Historiographical Conflict Thesis

In the early 1900s, liberal religious scholarship and scientific progress (most notably Darwinism) began to contradict the literalist interpretations of the bible that characterized evangelicalism (Ross, 2009). The concept of a historiographical “conflict thesis”, the absolute exclusion of religion from the pursuit of science, approach to the relationship between religion and science was introduced in the 19th century with the writings of John W. Draper and A. D. White (Bloore & Donovan, 1987; Ferngren, 2002). There is an argument within the literature as to whether this was/is an accurate and current representation of the state of the two parties, rather a new historiographical ‘complexity thesis’ is proposed (Bloore & Donovan, 1987; Ferngren, 2002). Poignant moments within the interplay between science and religion such as the Copernican displacement of the earth from the centre of the solar system, the resulting imprisonment of Galileo, and the introduction of Darwin’s theories, with the subsequent 1860 Oxford evolution debate, are often flouted as the pillars of conflict between the two parties (Bloore & Donovan, 1987; Ferngren, 2002). Researchers argue that the dogmatic and sharply opposing relationship between science and religion is softening into the “complexity thesis”, including the development of Christian scientist societies that seek to bring resolution to the two opposing parties (Bloore & Donovan, 1987; Ferngren, 2002). The opposing ideas introduced to a young adult throughout their education journey and experiences within religious institutions may be an important contributor to the reason why a NZ young adult may lose their faith, particularly Christianity.

Creationism versus Evolution

When asked which scientific topic caused the largest unreconcilable conflict, instinctively, people reference creationism versus evolution; however, there are still others that find a scientific conflict in other fields such as psychology (Wagstaff, 2004). Within the NZ secondary school educational framework,

biological evolution was introduced as a compulsory component of the 2007 curriculum, religious lobby groups strongly opposed this change, providing an example of young Christian New Zealanders being actively encouraged not to explore scientific learning as described above (Teaching evolution in NZ schools). The 2007 compulsory introduction of biological evolution into the scientific curriculum falls within the timeframe that the target population of this thesis would have been undertaking secondary school education. Thus it is possible that evolution could also be a key factor for losing one's faith in the NZ context.

Although investigators originally found that the concept of evolution was primary scientific conflict, "now, there are numerous other examples of religious claims conflicting with scientific ones; too many to list" (smith, 2017, P.3). Specifically, participants mention that their scientific conflict often began with common childhood bible stories, such as Jonah living in the belly of a whale or Jesus feeding five thousand people with five loaves, quite simply it just "didn't make sense" to them (Schaffner, 2006). The summation of scientific evidence that contradicts an evangelical, literal interpretation of the bible, is described to eventually create substantial doubt in an individual's framework of faith that they may disaffiliate with their religiosity and lose their faith. The literature, and history indicate that scientific conflict is a recognised reason as to why young adults lose their faith; however, there is no evidence examining the degree to which scientific conflict influences NZ young adults. Is scientific conflict the primary reason New Zealanders are losing their faith?

Young Adults and Disaffiliation with Christianity: Presence of Christian Thought within Moral and Political Debates

Contemporary disaffiliation with Christianity, especially in relation to young adults, has received considerable attention in US scholarship (Fisler et al., 2009; Puffer, 2018; Schaffner, 2017; Schwadel, 2017; Vaughn, 2016; Wagstaff, 2004). Views held by Christians or the Church surrounding moral or political issues of the day was cited within the literature as one of the leading contributing factors to individuals disaffiliating with Christianity (Edgell, n.d.; Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2011; Schaffner, 2017; Shibley, 1998; Uecker & Froese, 2019; Vaughn, 2016). There were two common themes regarding this topic in the literature; firstly, disagreement with the local church or Christians on moral and political issues and secondly, a disagreement that the church held a monopoly on morality compound by the hypocrisy of an immoral church labelling an individual as immoral (Nooney, 2006; Schaffner, 2017; Vaughn, 2016). Individuals also noted the immorality of the Christian faith itself regarding the bible and its edicts, this is discussed further above within biblical and theological inconsistencies (Schaffner, 2017). These themes were not mutually exclusive and individuals often experienced significant overlap, especially on topical issues that were interrelated with political and morality positions. Schaffner (2017) noted that individuals described their first doubts or misgivings about Christianity were often related to a disagreement around moral issues, these issues may not be described as the ultimate reason for disaffiliating with Christianity, but they provided the spark of further investigation into the individual's religious identity (Schaffner, 2017). Others found the church too political and stated this a reason for disaffiliation with Christianity (Vaughn, 2016). Nooney (2006) reported that disaffiliation with religion was more likely to come from those with a radical or leftist political orientation (Nooney, 2006).

The conflict of ideals is particularly relevant for young adults with Vaughn (2016), describing Millennials as "heavily involved in politics and social justice issues that relate to the excluded

communities, and the unlikelihood of the Church's approach to these issues changing may only cause more Millennials to decide to leave and not return" (Vaughn, 2016, p. 66). The morality issues within Christianity extend beyond sex and sexuality; however, while examining the literature, the primary moralistic issue was regarding sex and sexuality, with the exception of manipulation, discussed further below. This is described by Uecker and Froese (2019) stating that "for many Americans raised in the 1980s and 1990s, religion as they saw it around them seemed to be mostly about conservative politics and especially about traditional positions on issues of sexual morality, like homosexuality" (Uecker&Froese, 2019). Currently, "the biggest conflict between Millennials and the Church, creating an argument for why Millennials have been leaving the Church, is due to their disagreements on the treatment of the LGBTQ+ community, on politics, scripture, and other social justice issues, such as abortion, divorce, and issues relating to women's rights" (Vaughn, 2016, p. 64). The concept of moral issues and an individual's sexuality were intertwined within the literature, making these issues difficult to discuss separately.

Disagreement on Moral and Political Issues – Case Example Homosexuality and Marriage Equality

The most common moral and political issue that is explored and discussed within the literature is homosexuality and hence the topic of marriage equality. Schaffner (2017) found that among those raised in faiths that stressed the sinful nature of homosexuality and portrayed homosexuals as hedonists, familiarity with and empathy for homosexuals undermined the stereotype created by the church, and instead, individuals turned their scrutiny back to their church's moral and political stances (Schaffner, 2017). A quote from an individual in Wagstaff's (2004) research explains this dilemma well, particularly from an American perspective.

"Simultaneously, I began questioning what I viewed as the underlying functions of religion: morality transmission and community-building. Living in a large west coast city, I met gays and

lesbians negatively affected by religious doctrine masquerading as morality. I met people whom I considered compassionate and kind, who had never believed in a god at any point in their lives. I found communities of people being held together by common interests and simply caring for each other rather than because of metaphysical beliefs. I concluded that religion was not the only path to morality and community” (Wagstaff, 2004, p. 13).

According to the literature, how the church and Christians respond to issues surrounding sexuality and marriage equality is critical in some individual’s journey in exploring their religious identity and can impact their continued self-identification with Christianity.

The Issue of Marriage Equality in the New Zealand Context

When compared to religious countries such as America, Christianity in NZ, within the 21st Century, has a significantly ‘smaller voice’ within politics or societal reform (Malloy, 2017). Christianity no longer has the moral majority of the people; however, strong voices from this community can be heard ‘within the church walls’ or through organisations such as Family First, which the “Christian” opinion on political laws or ideas that go against traditional Christian values (*Family First NZ | Strong Families, Strong Nation*, n.d.; *Protect Marriage NZ Protect Marriage NZ*, n.d.). The most notable issues of recent history which have had strong opposition from collectives such as Family First, include the legalisation of prostitution, ‘Anti-Smacking Bill’ and the Marriage Equality Act, in which same-sex union was also previously fought within the context of a Civil Union (*Family First NZ*, n.d.). Interestingly, the collective Christian group can be seen to be holding the ‘conservative’ or ‘traditional view’ which is evident from the rise in the style of evangelical Christianity, versus the pro-reform voice of the liberal style in the 1960s.

Same-sex marriage was a political football most notably beginning in the 1990s and continuing till the passing of the Marriage Equality Act in 2013 (New Zealand Legislation, n.d.). The concept of same-sex marriage and hence the Marriage Equality Act created stern debate within NZ 21st century churches, a group of Christian leaders, from different organizations, churches, missionary groups, and denomination heads, signed a letter voicing concern about and opposition to the Marriage Equality Act which in turn was sent to parliament (*Marriage Bill - Open Letter from Church Leaders | Scoop News*, n.d.). A vast number of churches were represented in this collective including Alliance churches, Assembly of God, Baptist, Catholic, Presbyterian, Christian churches New Zealand, Calvary Chapel, Congregation Union church, Church of Nazarene, Elim, New Zealand Christian network, Harvest, Laidlaw College, Equippers Church, Acts Churches, City Impact, New Life, C3 churches, Wesleyan Methodist, and Vineyard (*Marriage Bill - Open Letter from Church Leaders | Scoop News*, n.d.).

Interestingly, the collective Christian group can be seen to be holding the ‘conservative’ or ‘traditional view’ which is evident from the rise in the style of evangelical Christianity, versus the pro-reform voice of the liberal style in the 1960s (Davidson, 1991; Lineham, 2014). Since the passing of the Marriage Equality Act in 2013, a few churches have changed their position, the majority have not, although the debate has since quietened publicly, it continues behind closed doors, particularly within EPC churches that hold onto “traditional marriage” values within their statement of belief. For young adults in NZ aged 20 to 30 years in 2020, the marriage equality conversation represents arguably the ‘loudest’ debate of a Christian value, belief, or tradition, during their lifetime. How this debate has then impacted on young adults' self-identification with Christianity within the NZ context needs to be explored further.

The Church's Monopoly on Morality

When examining the Christian context of morals and morality, those that are brought up in a Christian community are taught that societies morals and morality originate from the church/bible/Christianity and hence Christianity is responsible for providing the ongoing moral framework for society. This poses two problems; firstly, the church's view of monopoly on morality is a reason why individuals disaffiliate with Christianity and secondly, those that no longer wish to engage with religion must reconcile. Or consider a new moral framework (Schaffner, 2017; Wagstaff, 2004).

Living, making decisions, and behaving within a biblical or Christian moral framework is a major component of a Christian's life. This process is usually developed when an individual grows up within a Christian community or environment. Morals and morality are ingrained or intertwined deeply with Christianity; thus those disaffiliating with Christianity are required to reconcile their own personal choice, decisions, and beliefs, and determine a new moral framework, that does not use the bible or the church as the source for morality (Dravitzki, 2015). Schaffner (2017) summarises, in order for an individual to have a smooth transition from Christianity, morals and religion must be separated or decoupled (Schaffner, 2017). Wagstaff (2004) found that an initiator of the moral decoupling journey occurred when individuals saw or meet people from outside the church or Christianity that we also determined to be good people and of good morals (Wagstaff, 2004). Thus, creating an internal dilemma where the individual either reconciles their Christian morals and personal experiences, or chooses to decouple their morals from religion, specifically Christianity. This dilemma is confounded further when participants met and experienced goodness and good morals from members of the community that the church had labelled 'immoral', for example members of the LGBT+ community (Schaffner, 2017). Churches have painted these communities as immoral, which is in direct conflict with an individual's personal experiences with members of this community (Schaffner, 2017). In particular "among those raised in faiths that stress the

sinful nature of homosexuality and the portrayal of homosexual as hedonists, familiarity with and empathy for homosexuals can undermine the stereotype and turned their scrutiny back on their church's moral and political stances" (Schaffner, 2017, p.98). Many other moral dilemma examples exist within the body of literature, but strong feminist beliefs and conflicting morals around contemporary issues, particularly birth control, are frequently mentioned by participants (Fisler et al., 2009). A participant within a study conducted by Ross (2009) described their personal experience with the following statement.

"If I'm a feminist, I don't think I can be a Christian. I'm pro-choice, I don't think I can be a Christian. I'm really comfortable with homosexuality, and my life is woven with people who are gay now, and the idea that I would ever worship with somebody who didn't believe that [being gay] was just a celebration of human sexuality was just, like, I could never even contemplate going back to any of those churches (Ross, 2009, p.104) .

Thus, the impression that Christianity, the church, or the bible holds a monopoly on good morals, is a significant contributor to individuals disaffiliating with Christianity, due to the conflict of taught morals and personal experiences (Schaffner, 2017; Wagstaff, 2004). Moral dilemmas featured as a strong contributing factor for disaffiliating with Christianity in the literature; however, research is required to understand the extent to which moral dilemmas contribute to the NZ narrative and which contemporary moralistic issues are most important to young adults in NZ.

Gender and Affiliation with Christianity

Throughout the literature, regarding several different issues or topics, women are disproportionately more likely to experience more negative aspects of Christianity than men, which in turn contributes to women disaffiliating with Christianity (Gillette, 2015, 2017). Common themes within the literature regarding gender explore the impact of, gender roles, oppression, and moral issues on continuing affiliation with Christianity.

Although modern-day churches, across various denomination, hold a wide range of views regarding gender, the patriarchal nature of Christianity is alive and well, particularly within EPC churches. The literature describes that women reported the patriarchal nature of religion and religious institutions and the subsequent oppression experience within the church, compared with society, as a component of choosing to disaffiliate with Christianity (Schaffner, 2017). Schaffner (2017) also commented that “female respondents are more likely to report stigmatization and pressure stemming from leaving religion than are male respondent...because women are expected to have greater sexual purity and family responsibilities (Schaffner, 2017).

The literature commented that women within fundamentalist Christianity group experienced subordination or oppression and with one study 39% of “female respondents mentioned the sexism inherent in many organized religions in their exit narratives. In contrast, only eighteen percent of male respondents did” (Gillette, 2015; Ross, 2009; Schaffner, 2017, p. 200). With women typically facing harsher criticism than men for behaviours outside of the expected Christian identity (Pearce et al., 2019). Interestingly, when exploring the reasons why women are disaffiliating with Christianity, women have a greater tendency to focus on moral issues, including the LGBT+ community, than men (Schaffner, 2017; Vaughn, 2016). Vaughn specifically found that “women were twice as likely to leave the Church and religion due to the religion teachings or the treatment of the LGBTQ+ community in comparison to men” (Vaughn, 2016, p. 34).

The body of research assessing the differences in the reasoning for declining religiosity between men and women is limited and detailed, thorough research is required to obtain a broader understanding

of the issue. The research conducted within this thesis will assess the results and data collected to understand whether any gender patterns occur for young adults in the NZ context.

Sexual Activity

Historically, Christian communities are known for holding a typically conservative view regarding sexual activity, such as no engagement with sexual activity prior to marriage, which in turn has differing ramifications for women than men (Gillette, 2015, 2017). Research has found that as an individual's sexual activity increases, they are more inclined to determine that religion "is less important than they once reported" (Uecker et al., 2007, p. 1681). Interestingly, cohabitation prior to marriage is powerfully associated with religious attendance decline, even when accounting for sexual activity (Uecker et al., 2007). Individuals may be less inclined to engage with religious activities if they believe their current sexual activity may be judged by others.

When assessing the limited research available, women's religiosity seems to be disproportionately affected by sexual activity than men's. More research is required to quantify this effect further, but many studies describe women participants that they feel a residual guilt associated with sexual activity that means they are less likely to continue to engage with religious activities (Schaffner, 2017). This feeling of residual guilt likely stems from a conservative Christian view that places a "higher preference on women's chastity and sexual purity" than men's (Schaffner, 2017, p. 122). The relevance of differing gender experiences requires further investigation, particularly within the NZ young adult population.

The Role of Abuse in Disaffiliation with Christianity

A key theme consistently found in the literature as a reason why individuals disaffiliated with Christianity was the broader theme of abuse, this included verbal, psychological and verbal abuse experienced or witnessed by studied persons (Chase, 2013; Ross, 2009; Tailor et al., 2014; Wagstaff, 2004). Verbal and psychological abuse can include the theme of 'Christians being judgmental' but the studied populations also state that the 'feeling of judgement' does not adequately encompass the traumatic psychological and verbal abuse, from name calling and bullying to 'guilt trips', experienced by respondents (Ross, 2009). This in turn lead individuals to lose their faith and disaffiliate with Christianity (Ross, 2009).

Sexual Abuse

The literature explores the differing themes within sexual abuse that were commonly stated reasons for disaffiliating with Christianity, or the creation of doubts and misgivings towards Christianity (Chase, 2013; Ross, 2009; Schaffner, 2017; Tailor et al., 2014; Wagstaff, 2004). Firstly, the literature describes the impact of personal experience sexual abuse, or the experience of a person close to the individual, this was commonly paired with the scenario in which the abuser was someone well known to the individual (Chase, 2013; Ross, 2009; Schaffner, 2017; Tailor et al., 2014; Wagstaff, 2004). This impact of either experiencing or uncovering these events was devastating for the individuals and often led them away from Christianity (Chase, 2013; Ross, 2009; Schaffner, 2017; Tailor et al., 2014; Wagstaff, 2004). The second facet was the experience or uncovering of sexual abuse on an institutional level (Chase, 2013; Ross, 2009; Schaffner, 2017; Tailor et al., 2014; Wagstaff, 2004).

Accounts given to Schaffner (2009) indicated that individuals first misgivings about religion were brought on by their own personal abuse at the hands of those within the religion such as members or

pastors, or the treatment of someone close to them such as a brother or sister who was abused (Schaffner, 2009). Others indicated that the sexual abuse at an institutional level, many citing the Catholic Church as a well-known example, lead to misgivings and were a part of their story of leaving religion (Schaffner, 2009). Some victims of childhood sexual abuse stated that they rely on religion as a source of support in their ongoing lives, however the majority indicated a decline in engagement with religion or religiosity in their young adult to adult years (Tailor et al., 2014).

Abuse is a horrific and exceedingly disappointing component in the relationship between an individual and religion, it is a multi-faceted and complex topic that in order to be explored to the full extent needs to be completed in a safe manner with adequate support for the individual. The research conducted as a part of this thesis provides the space to allow individuals to bring this topic up if they feel comfortable to do so ; it does not directly ask about abuse experienced or witnessed as the anonymity of the survey does not allow for appropriate support to be offered or provided to the individual if required.

Impact of Religion, Christianity, on Individual Mental Health

The impacts religion, specifically Christianity, had on an individual's mental health was a common theme found by scholars within literature (Chase, 2013; Longest & Uecker, 2018; Ross, 2009; Wagstaff, 2004) . Interestingly, this theme typically wasn't sought by investigators, but rather was raised by participants frequently, of their own fruition (Chase, 2013; Longest & Uecker, 2018; Ross, 2009; Wagstaff, 2004). Three impacts of Christianity on mental health were noted within the literature.

Individuals found their religion or faith was so closely linked with their perceived identity, thus when internal dilemma, conflict or cognitive dissonance occurred, this status of conflict affected their mental health in a negative sense. The negative mental health effects of Christianity were compounded

by other common themes within the literature such as; experience of judgment, moral dilemmas and discovery of or experience of abuse. Subsequently, once individuals decided to disaffiliate with Christianity, many described a tangible improvement in their mental health status, this is proposed to be due to a release from having to live up to the expectation or identity of what a Christian is, thus the individual was able to live freely as their own individual. Some women, who were previously engaged with more fundamental faiths, stated that the experienced mental health benefits of disaffiliating with their faith corresponded with the lifting of their oppression (Gillette, 2017). Contrary to above a couple of studies noted that some individuals experienced benefits from religion in relation to their mental health (Gillette, 2015; Wagstaff, 2004).

The research conducted as a part of this thesis provides the space to allow individuals to bring this topic up if they felt comfortable to do so ; it does not directly ask about individual's mental health status as the anonymity of the survey does not allow for appropriate support to be offered or provided to the individual if required.

Conclusions from the Literature

A review of the academic scholarship reveals a gap in available literature regarding the factors contributing to declining numbers of NZ young adults self-identifying as Christian. The examination of the sociology of religion has become a severely neglected field of research within NZ and internationally researchers from the US have stressed the importance of conducting further research exploring the factors contributing to declining religiosity, particularly within the millennial age group (Fisler et al., 2009; Gillette, 2015; Hill, 2008; Owens, 2011; Schaffner, 2017; C. Smith et al., 2002; Troughton et al., 2014; Ward, 2016; Wilcox et al., 2012). The NZ census statistics indicate that increasing numbers of young adults aged 20 to 30 years disaffiliating with Christianity is increasing; however, little research has been conducted examining the sociological factors contributing to this decline. International scholarship, particularly from the US proposes possible influences such as; effect of home life, higher education, network effects, biblical and theological inconsistencies, tension in moral and political ideals and dissuasion from sexual activity. Although multiple theories for international reduction in religiosity have been proposed, authors within the scholarship are still in disagreement and have not obtained a consensus (Uecker et al., 2007). When looking at research within the New Zealand context, it's not hard to find information noting the decline but it is strange that such a social phenomenon is lacking the explanation and sociological study and explaining why this has occurred.

CHAPTER 3: DESCRIPTION OF METHODS AND ANALYSIS

The following chapter outlines the study setting, defines the target population, discusses the protocol for data collection, describes the survey techniques used and how data was analysed by the researcher.

Study Setting and Population

This research was conducted in New Zealand between December 2020 to March 2021. Participants were invited to participate in this research if they were New Zealanders, white/NZ European/Pākehā individuals who underwent a significant change in their religious identity, specifically Christianity, between the ages of 20 to 30 years old.

Research Questions

The primary research question this thesis seeks to explore is to understand what factors are influencing the decline in religious identity/affiliation with Christianity among white/Pākehā New Zealand young adults aged 20 to 30 years. Secondary research questions, created with the intention of gaining greater insight into the primary purpose of this research included:

- What role have Christian values, beliefs, rules, and traditions played in an individual's disaffiliation with Christianity?
- Did participants experience a contradiction between the values, beliefs, rules, and traditions taught to them throughout childhood and their subsequent life experiences? Did this contradiction influence an individual's change in religious identity or disaffiliation with Christianity?

Data Collection Protocol

Qualitative and quantitative data points were collected from participants via an online survey written within the Qualtrics® survey program tool. An online survey was the most suitable instrument to collect data as it enabled engagement with and opinions from a wide population base and provided an anonymous, non-judgmental platform in which respondents could state their experiences and opinions without fear of judgment or retribution. Ethical certification to undertake this study was obtained from the Waikato University Board of Ethics, reference FS2020-63. Participants were provided with the information sheet at the beginning of the survey and participating in the survey was determined as consenting for participant provided data to be included in this research.

The Qualtrics® online survey was active from December 2020 to March 2021, a variety of methods were used to disseminate the online survey. A public Facebook® page titled “Research on Young Adult Religious change NZ” was created as a platform that contained information regarding this thesis via written and video mediums; a link to the online survey was also provided for individuals who wished to participate in this research. . Facebook was used as a medium to disseminate the survey as it is a platform the target population, individuals aged 20 to 30 years old, regularly engage with (*New Zealand - Facebook Users by Age | Statista*, n.d.). Research in NZ, 2018, found that the highest Facebook® users were aged are 25 to 30 years, the second- highest engagement is those aged 20 to 25 years, thus the intended participant population for this thesis are the highest users of Facebook® in NZ (*New Zealand - Facebook Users by Age | Statista*, n.d.). Facebook® has been acknowledged as an effective method of spreading or sharing an idea or message, the Facebook® algorithms provide a subconscious method of viral snowballing (*Facebook as a Research Tool*, n.d.). Facebook® paid advertising is targeted to a specific audience selected by the advertiser, hence within the context of research, paid advertising is an effective method of spreading the survey to the intended audience fitting the age criteria for the research (Franz

et al., 2019). Paid Facebook[®] advertising was used by the researcher for this thesis in order to engage with individuals who fit the age criteria unknown to the researcher and their connections.

Information regarding the survey was also sent to key informants and insiders, religious institutions, church leaders and Christian young adult leaders from churches across the country, who were asked to pass on the survey onto their connections, i.e., individuals who may fit the study criteria. The key informants and insiders were integral to identifying possible study participants and spreading the survey via word of mouth and snowballing sampling. The key informants substantiated the trend of decreasing affiliation with Christianity identified within census data. Those individuals had noted a similar trend within their congregations across all ages; however, the strongest disaffiliation with Christianity was within the young adult cohort, aged 20 to 30 years. The primary researcher, Luke Furborough, also engaged with personal contacts, including key informants or insiders and eligible participants, to disseminate the survey to these persons via Facebook[®] and email. Beyond dissemination via key informants, insiders, and the researcher, it is possible the survey was spread via word of mouth and snowballing sampling from individuals that engaged with Facebook[®] advertising and the Facebook[®] research page.

Limitations

This thesis was exposed to both limitations that influenced the ability of the researcher to conduct the research and the nature of the methodology introduced limitations into the quality of responses. Firstly, the time within which this research was completed introduced limitations within the methodology. The environment in which this survey was prepared and subsequently data was collected during the national and international COVID-19 pandemic. During these pandemic conditions, meetings with a few key informants were undertaken virtually; this impacted the ability of rapport and a professional

relationship built on trust to be established. Data collection occurred over the summer period within NZ, which may have reduced the ability of key informants to snowball the questionnaire to their connections who fit the criteria and were eligible to participate.

The use of an online questionnaire as a tool for data collection introduces limitations into this study. As discussed above, although email was used as a method of distribution, the primary distribution method was the use of Facebook[®]. Therefore, it became more difficult for eligible participants who are not Facebook[®] users to become aware of this research and hence to engage with the questionnaire, no random population sampling was able to occur. The online medium provides an environment for the participant in which anonymity can be maintained. However, it is not a space in which individuals naturally feel compelled to share life stories or experiences, and it does not allow the research to pursue a line of relevant questioning, nor seek an explanation from the participant. Therefore, limiting the data which was provided.

A limitation within the structure of the questionnaire was the necessity to ask broad, open questions. Little research has been completed in the field of sociology within the NZ context, assessing young adults; therefore the researcher had to consider collecting broader data to explore possible factors influencing the declining religiosity of young adults. The lack of evidence or previous research prevented the use of a specific line of questioning on a topic hypothesised but not yet substantiated as a factor in young adult disaffiliation with Christianity. The requirement for open, broad questioning introduces participant interpretation of the question, and the use of an online medium prevented the researcher from providing further clarification thus potentially limiting the depth of qualitative data collected.

Participant fatigue can introduce a limitation of the quality of data collected towards the end of a survey and may have been present within this research. During data analysis a limitation of this research was noted, eligible individuals who self-identified as male were less likely to engage with the questionnaire and those that did, gave a lower quality of qualitative answers. This is a possible example of the limit of using an online medium in which to gather life stories and experiences from male participants. Due to the poorer quality of responses received from male participants, a possible limitation of this thesis is that the data may not provide adequate insight into the factors influencing self-identifying males to undertake a change in religious identity.

Description of Survey

The format of an online survey created the opportunity to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data points (see **Appendix**). The first component of the questionnaire established participant demographics and childhood religiosity. Schaffner's (2017) research and survey, "Paths out of Religious: A Cartography of Atheism," was conducted in Chicagoland and neighbouring states within the US between 2015 to 2017. Participants were 18 and older, had identified as a Christian during their childhood but at the time of the survey self-identified as atheist. Schaffner identified that examining life stories was central to obtaining data whereby the author was able to identify trends and shifts in consciousness as it relates to religious beliefs. The questionnaire for this thesis took influence from Schaffner's (2017) questioning and exploration of participant demographic and childhood or early religiosity data, questions were adapted to fit the social context of NZ young adults for this research (Schaffner, 2017). The purpose of childhood religiosity is to establish the relevance and reverence of religion within an individual's upbringing, for example, an individual may have only been exposed to Christianity at holiday festivities such as Christmas/Easter compared with another individual whose childhood daily life consisted of

attending church activities and practicing Christian behaviours in the home. Childhood religiosity explores the participant's level of engagement with religious schools, religious institutions or differing Christian denominations, Christian faith practices for which they were exposed. The relevance of exploring childhood religiosity within this thesis is to establish the extent of change in religious identity as a young adult. Participants were asked to reflect upon the sources of exposure to deeply held beliefs from childhood.

The second component of the questionnaire explored which values, beliefs, traditions, or rules participants previously held when identifying as Christian, how these beliefs and values changed after experiencing a change in religious identification and the degree to which their life experiences altered a participant's belief system to a point wherein, they no longer strongly identified or associated with Christianity. The academic scholarship indicates that if an individual is exposed to a differing set of values or rules than they ascribed to, this is a contributing factor towards disaffiliating from Christianity. Key informants advised the researcher to leave the wording in this line of questioning open, to allow the participant to provide their own interpretation, rather than introducing the bias of the researcher.

The third component of the questionnaire sought to understand Christian based teaching participants received on the following topics, sex, gender, alcohol, homosexuality, right/wrong/sin, other religions, hell, and community service., whether these teachings aligned with participants' life experiences and subsequently influenced their change in religious identity or disaffiliation with Christianity. These topics were identified by the researcher initially from their own insider knowledge and experiences with young adults disaffiliating with Christianity, these topics were substantiated by key informants, young adult Church leaders and theologian. The aforementioned topics are discussed within the academic scholarship in an international setting but have not been explored in a New Zealand setting.

The final component of the questionnaire collected qualitative data by asking open-ended questions, providing participants with the opportunity to share their life story and experiences that influenced their change in religious identity, ensured that participants were able to reveal other factors that influenced their disaffiliation with Christianity not otherwise covered by the researcher.

Data Collection and Analysis:

Data was analysed in an interpretive approach, specifically phenomenological, intended to uncover the essence of the accounts which were given by the respondents (Berg, N.D). Data analysis was completed using open, axial, and selective coding. Data was firstly analysed by open coding analysis of the qualitative responses within the survey (Berg, 2004). The primary themes used for open coding analysis were drawn from recurrent themes identified within academic scholarship, this included, but was not limited to, environmental factors, education, abuse, intellectual thought, moral and political issues, and mental health. Central themes or recurring features in each survey were bracketed and classified according to key concepts. Axial coding of the primary themes allowed for linkages to be created between and within the primary themes and commonality between respondents' messages could be found (Berg, 2004). At the completion of axial coding, selective coding revealed a central theme in which the key features and concepts previously identified could all be connected to.

Quantitative data points will be used to display demographics of the studied population and for the stratification of resulting data sets. The coding was completed by the primary researcher, Luke Furberough, and results were reviewed by supervisor, Adele Norris, prior to submission. All data was anonymized during coding and prior to analysis.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

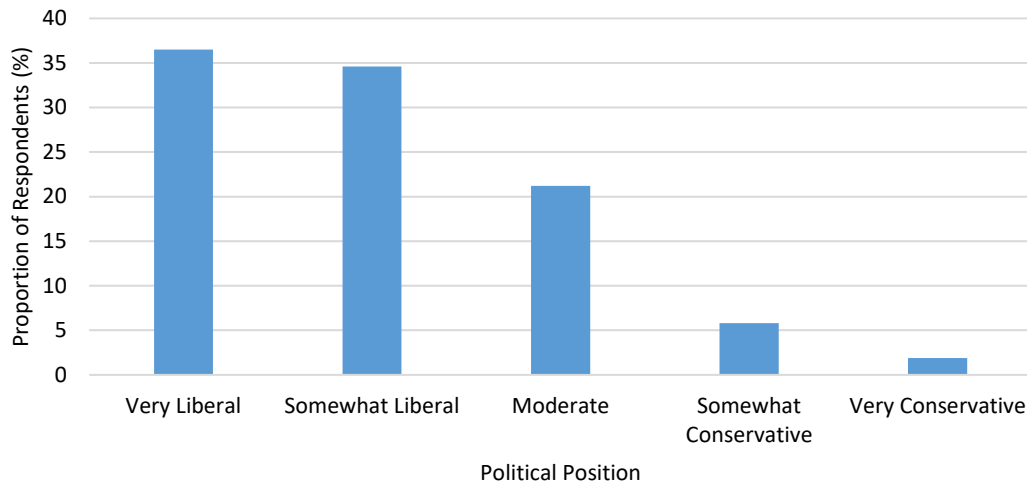
This section of writing details the research findings obtained from surveying eligible participants. Firstly, the demographics of survey respondents is outlined, the subsequent results are then detailed into the following sections: participant religiosity demographics, childhood religiosity, transition of religious identity, identified position of values, beliefs, traditions and rules, agreement with religious teaching, reasons for disaffiliation with Christianity and the impact on respondent's mental health.

Participant Demographics

A total of 75 individuals engaged with the survey, 18 participants were excluded as they did not meet the inclusion criteria for this research and a further five respondents were omitted from data analysis as they consented to participate in this research but neglected to complete any questions within the survey. Thus 52 participants or survey responses were carried forward for data analysis. Respondents were aged between 20 to 39 years with a median age of 27.5 years. Fifty percent (26) of respondents were female, of which 42.3% (22) were male, 5.8% (3) identified as non-binary or third gender and 1.9% (1) preferred not to say. Respondents primarily identified their relationship status as married or with long-term partner, 27% and 25% respectively, with the remaining 47% of respondents identifying as single. A total of 75% of respondents self-identified their sexual orientation as heterosexual, 11.5% as homosexual, the remaining 7.7% and 5.8% identified as bisexual and other, respectively.

Figure 7

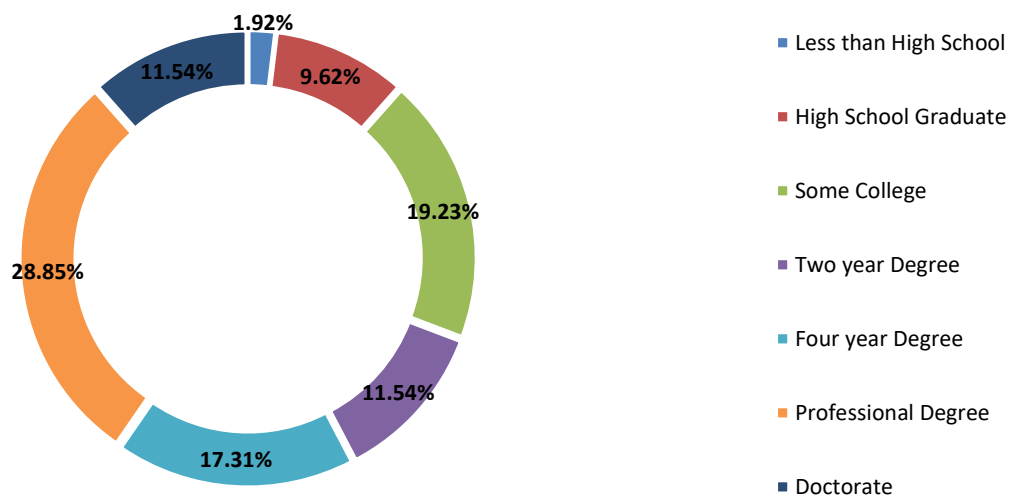
The Self-identified Political Position of Respondents regarding Social and Economic Issues.



As demonstrated in figure seven, the majority of participants identified politically as somewhat to very liberal, whilst 7.7% of respondents identified as somewhat or very conservative. Approximately two thirds of respondents had attained post high school education, see figure eight, including 11.54% of individuals completing their doctorate.

Figure 8

The Distribution of the Level of Education Attained by Participants.

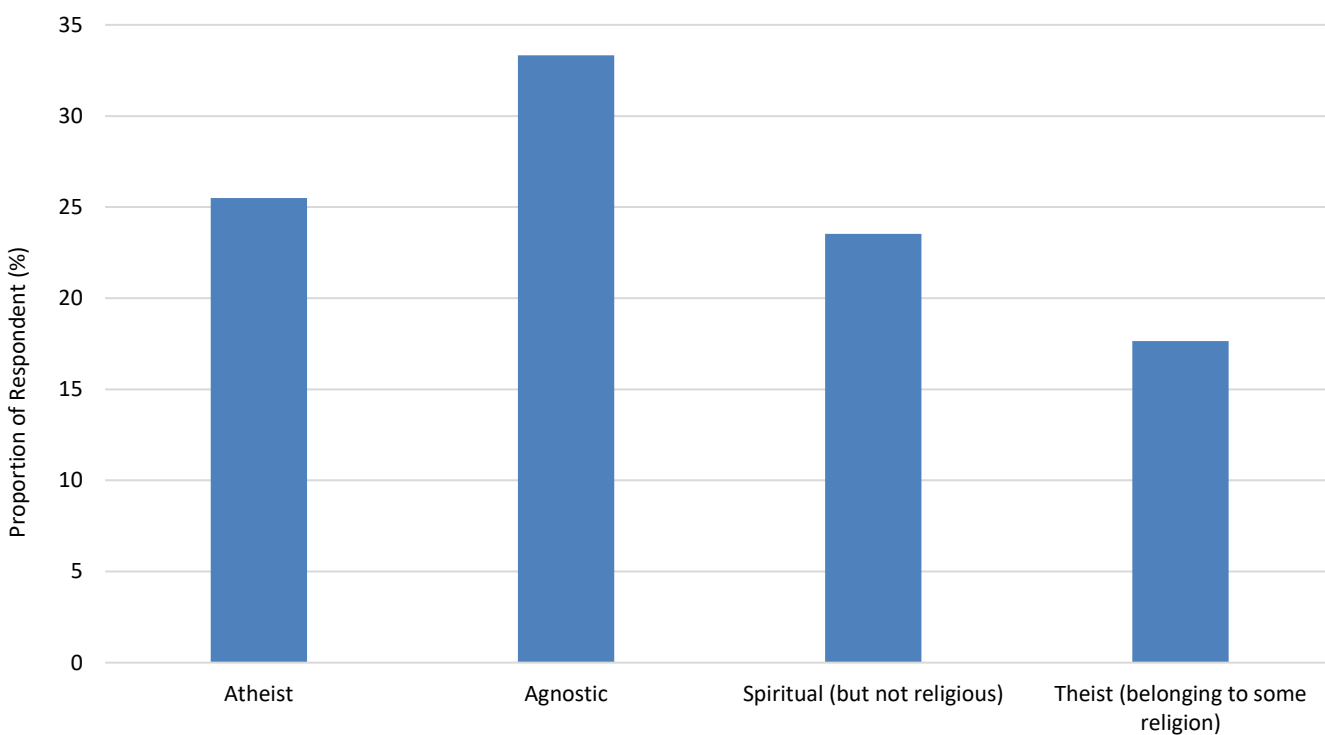


The locality of participants was primarily (76%) within the North Island, with a disproportionately high number of respondents identifying as residing in or being from the Waikato region (38%).

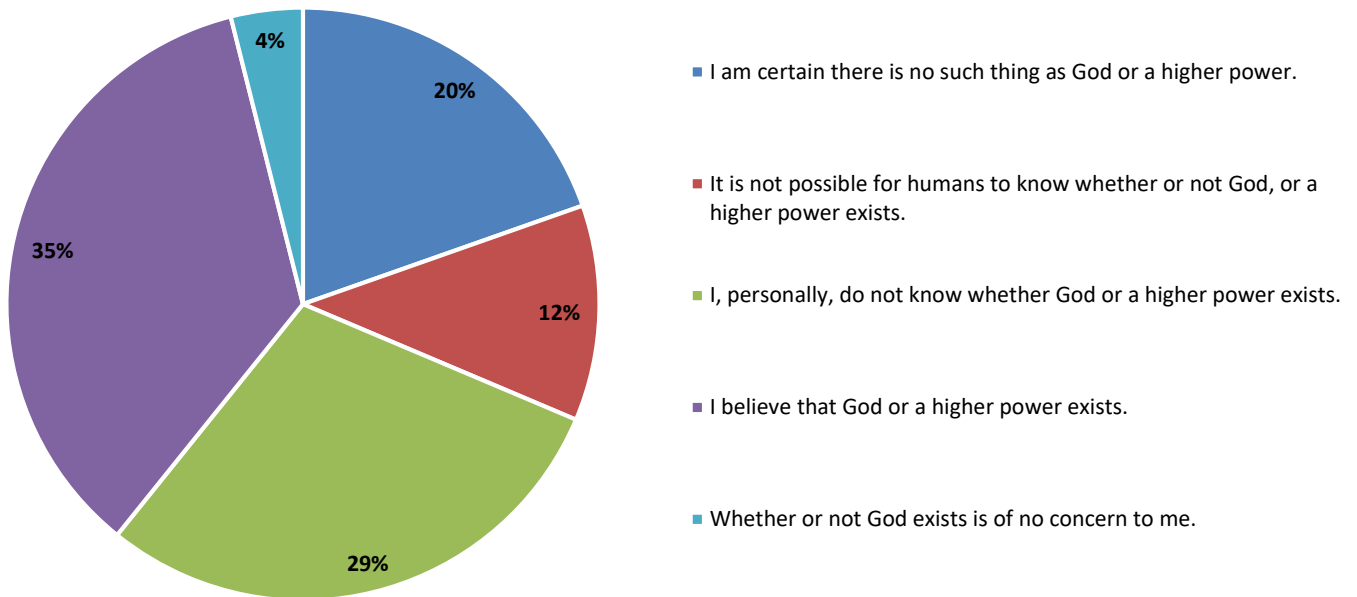
Participant Religiosity Demographics

Figure 9

Participant's Self-Identified Current State of Religiosity



Respondents were then asked to identify their state of religiosity at the time of engaging with the survey; approximately 42% of individuals identified as spiritual or belong to a religion, as demonstrated in figure nine, whilst 33% and 25% identified as agnostic and atheist respectively. These responses were further explored, figure 10, by establishing participant's religious position, 35% still believed that God or a higher power existed, while 20% firmly believed the opposite.

Figure 10*Participants' Self-Identified Current Religious Position*

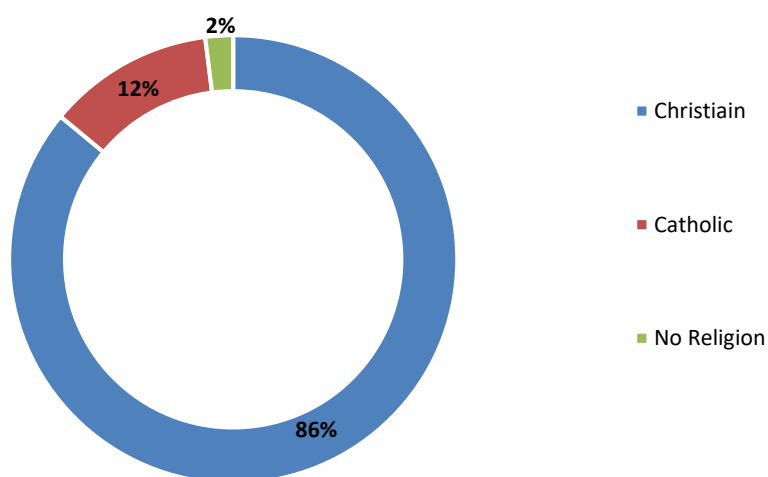
In total, 52 eligible respondents completed the survey, the majority of which self-identified as politically liberal and had obtained higher education beyond high school. A disproportionately high number of respondents lived in the Waikato region, possibly as a consequence of the researcher's primary location of residence. Participant's religiosity at the time of completing the survey was reasonably spread and approximately half of respondents identified as atheist or agnostic. Whilst the writings prior have established the demographic spread of the participant population; the following section will present the degree of childhood religiosity identified by participants.

Childhood Religiosity

To gain insight into the factors leading to participant's shift in religious identity, it was first important to obtain and examine major childhood religious influences and the messages taught or received via these differing resources or institutions. Numerous questions were asked of participants to establish the extent of childhood religiosity. Participants were primarily raised as Christian, 86% (44), whilst only 2% (1) were raised with no religion, as shown in figure 11.

Figure 11

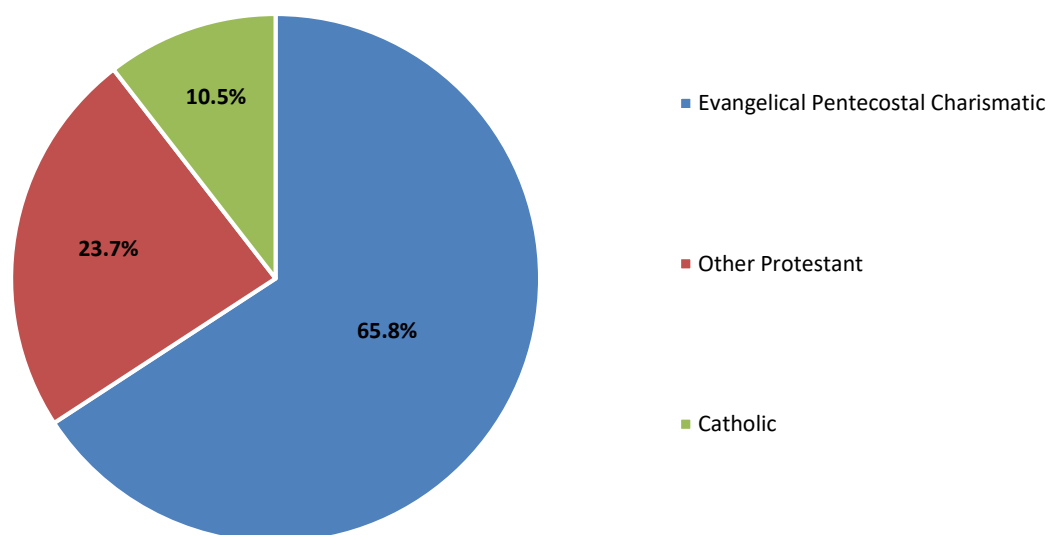
The Religion in which Participants Identified being Raised Within.



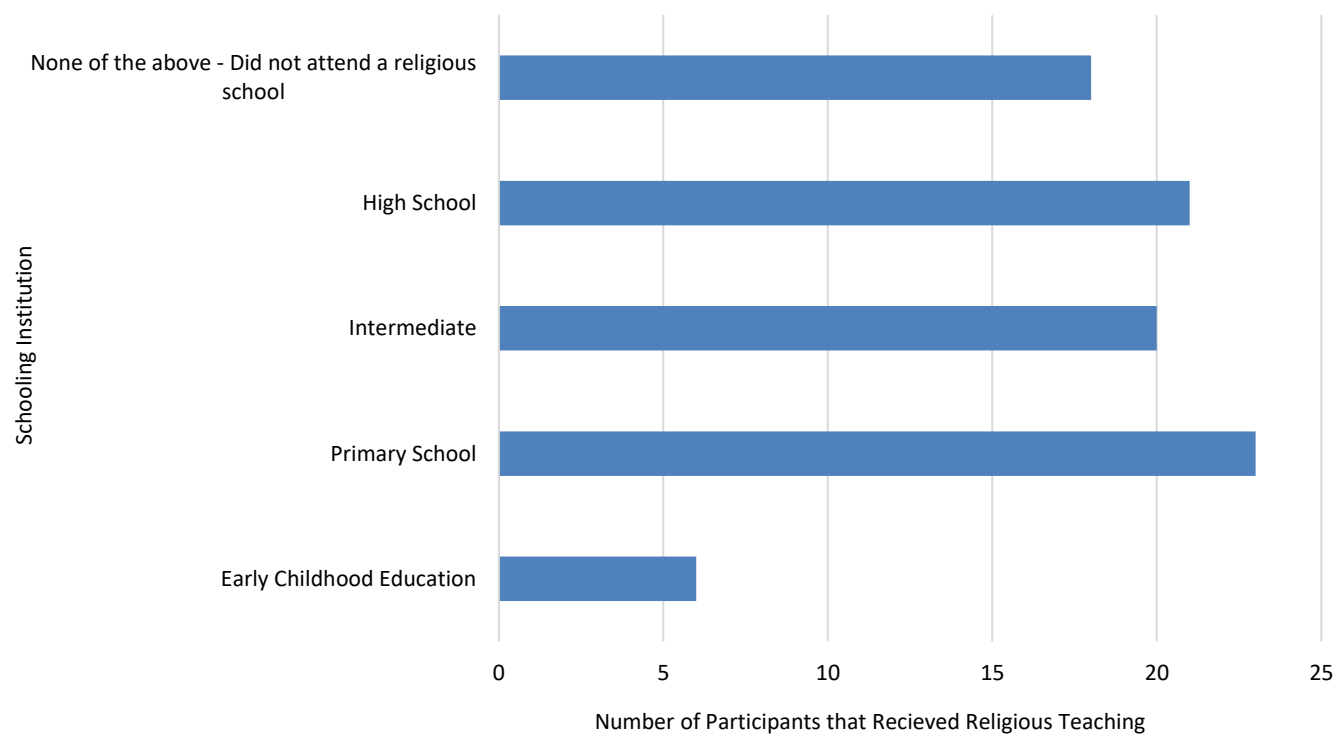
Participants were then asked to further describe which denomination they were most closely associated with; responses were categorised into one of three groups: EPC, other Protestant and Catholic. Not all participants completed this question, thus analysis was completed on this smaller group (38) as seen in figure 12. Of those that responded, 66% were identified as involved with EPC churches, Catholic was not able to be further defined due to the poor quality of responses, whilst the remaining 23.7% (9) were categorised as being from other Protestant denominations.

Figure 12

The Denomination in which Participants Identified as being Raised within.

**Figure 13**

Schooling Institutions in which Participants were Exposed to Religious Teaching



Another determinant of childhood religiosity is the extent of engagement with religious teaching at education institutions. Of the respondents, 34.6% (18) did not attend any religious school, while other participants engaged with multiple institutions, as shown in figure 13. At least 20 participants received religious teaching from primary, intermediate, and high school.

A series of ordinal questions were posed, which asked participants to reflect upon the primary religious teachings they received and determine the extent to which these teachings were emphasised. These teachings could be from laymen religious teachers, for example, parents, or formalised religious leaders. Participants were asked to rate answers from zero, not at all, to four, to a great extent, as seen in table one. Table one demonstrates the extent to which participants were taught to make their religion an important and central component within their daily lives. All answers were weighted between two to four, which demonstrated that religion was taught to a moderate and/or great extent, indicating that a strong importance was placed on religion, Christianity, in the daily lives of participants and the way in which they interacted with society. With a standard deviation (STD) 1.29, the largest spread of results was noted regarding emphasis placed on how wrong it would be to leave one's religion, whilst the lowest mean, 2.24, was regarding the need for reverence and obedience to leaders. There were three statements that were consistently taught to a considerable or great extent, including religion is the most central part of participant's lives (mean 3.43, STD 0.77), religion is relevant in day-to-day living (mean 3.28, STD 0.84), and the insistence of a personal commitment to God (mean 3.49, STD 0.86).

Table 1

The Mean Answers Regarding the Extent to which Following Topics regarding how Religion was Taught to Participants.

	Mean	Std Deviation
Stress religion as the most central part of your life?	3.43	0.77
Emphasize regularly attending religious services at your house of worship?	3.17	1.02
Make religion relevant to day-to-day living?	3.28	0.84
Stress reverence and obedience for religious leaders?	2.24	1.18
Insist upon you making a personal commitment to God?	3.49	0.86
Provide a strict interpretation of scripture and religious rules?	2.64	1.18
Stress that you must follow these religious rules absolutely, without exception?	2.70	1.11
Did you pray regularly (i.e., before meals)?	3.33	1.08
Encourage you to pray on your own (i.e., before bed)?	3.11	1.12
Emphasize how wrong it would be to leave your religion?	2.45	1.29
Attend events with your religious community aside from regular services (e.g., church potlucks or choir rehearsals)?	2.89	1.18
Encourage you to read your holy book (bible) or other religious texts on your own?	3.25	1.11

Table 2

The Mean Answers Regarding the Extent to which it was Emphasised to Participants their Childhood Religion was the 'Only True Religion' and the Emphasis placed on Subsequent Topics.

	Mean	Std Deviation
Teachings emphasised that those who did not follow your religion would go to hell?	2.82	1.47
Stress that all other forms of morality, including those of other faiths, are inferior to your religion's morality?	2.63	1.38
Encourage you to learn about other faiths?	1.24	1.29
Encourage you to respect other faiths?	1.67	1.16
State that people from other faiths had to convert to your religion?	2.50	1.47

Table two followed in a similar vein to above but instead explored the following themes: the teaching that the childhood religion of participants was ‘one true religion’ and an examination of their childhood appreciation of other faiths. Participants were only taught to learn about other religions and respect other faiths to a slight or moderate extent, 1.24 (STD 1.29) and 1.67 (STD 1.16), respectively. There was a trend toward ‘taught to a considerable extent’ regarding the inferiority of the morality of other religions and that persons from other religions would ‘go to hell’, the STD with these teachings were wide, these themes may have been stressed within certain participants’ upbringing but not others.

The summation of above demonstrates that the participants who contributed toward this research scored highly on the childhood religiosity scale. Thus Christianity, its values, beliefs rules and teachings, were a central component in the framework of their upbringing. The process of disaffiliating with Christianity would therefore suggest a large change in religious identity occurred for these individuals.

Transition of Religious Identity

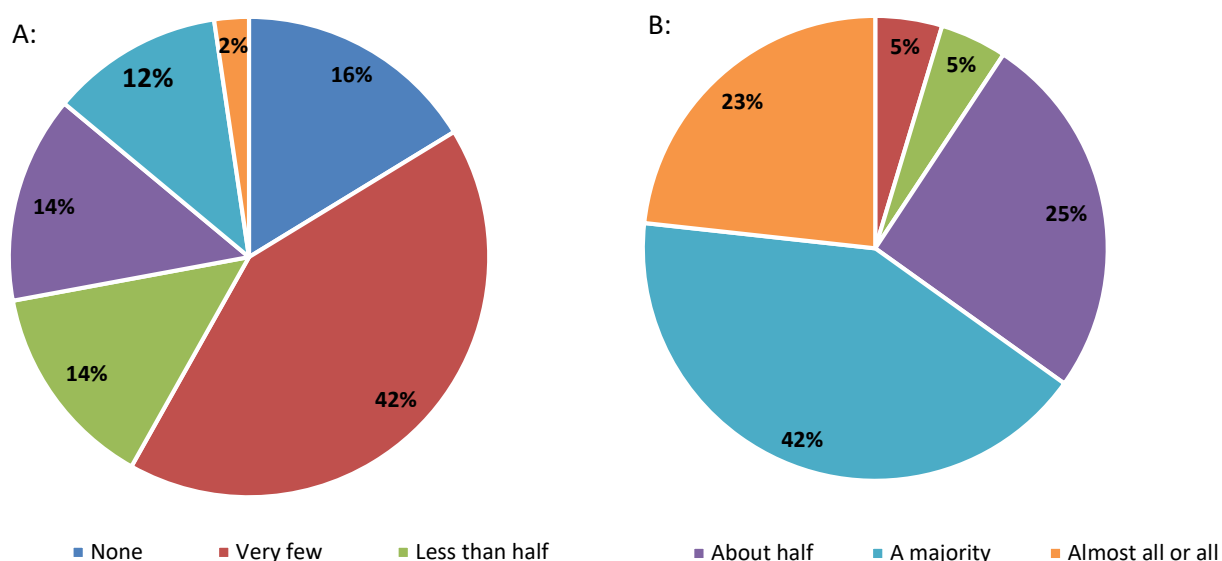
The average age at which participants reported they began to struggle with their religious identity was 17 (ages were spread from 10 to 26 years). Figure 14, chart A, demonstrates that at the aforementioned age (17), 58% of respondents found that none or very few of their friends and/or family were from other religions, and 14% identified that a majority or almost all of their friends and/or family were of another faith. The average time frame between the age of initial misgivings and disaffiliation with Christianity was three to four years, 3.7 years. The average age at which participants no longer identified with Christianity was 21 years. Figure 14, chart B, demonstrates that at the time of the survey, 5% of

participants identified that none or very few of their friends and/or family were non-religious, whilst 65% of respondents identified that a majority or almost all their friends and/or family were non-religious.

Figure 14

A: At the Respondents Age of First Misgivings Regarding Christianity, what Proportion of their Friends or Family was from another Faith?

B: Currently, at the time of Survey, what Proportion of Respondent's Friends or Family are non-Religious?



Self-Identified Position on Values, Beliefs, Traditions, and Rules

Values and Beliefs

As a component of the qualitative aspect of this research, participants were asked to identify which values and beliefs from Christianity for which they still ascribed at the time of completing the survey. The primary value and belief identified was the “golden rule,” which refers to the respect, care, and love for others. Generic societal values were identified next, such as do not murder or lie, the majority of which share values from the Old Testament’s Ten Commandments. Some participants identified that

they no longer hold any beliefs or values from Christianity, with one respondent identifying that “values are not monopolised by religion.” Lastly, community service and other generic forms of religious belief such as, ‘love thy neighbour’ and being ‘honest, patient or kind’ were identified by respondents.

Participants were then asked to identify the values or beliefs from Christianity that they no longer ascribe to, upon analysis six themes emerged in relation to conflicting attitudes identified by individuals as core religious childhood teachings. The majority of participants specified that they no-longer ascribed to judgemental opinions or disaffiliation with non-Christian groups or persons, individuals stated they were now “more accepting of others.” In particular, respondents referred to casting aside their belief of being “anti” or “against” LGBTQI individuals and community.

Within the judgemental mentality ascribed to Christianity to the LGBTQI community identified by participants, the concept of intentionally no longer believing in the concepts of sin and hell re-emerged. Their childhood religious teachings had described the actions of the LGBTQI community as “sinful” and thus the acceptance of this community also coincided with no longer accepting actions or behaviour as sinning. This response reveals the conflict between participant’s’ lived-experiences as a young adult and childhood religious teachings.

Sexual activity and the institution of marriage was another theme identified throughout the analysis. Christian beliefs and values regarding sexual activity or sexual ethics extending into the definitions of and need to ascribe to gender roles emerged as beliefs respondents no longer held. Participants also mentioned the institution of marriage and divorce as a source of tension wherein they no longer held with the same absolute reverence as previously taught for the institution of marriage.

Religious teachings around anti-evolution were also identified within the qualitative responses. Participants stated that they were more accepting of scientific teaching and thought and no longer ascribed to an “anti-science” or “anti-evolution” beliefs or values. An overarching theme that can be identified within each of the themes mentioned above was that God was no longer viewed as a requirement to “make you whole” and respondents cast aside the need to “feel guilt and shame” for their actions, in which the Church or Christianity had deemed sinful.

At this point it is also important note that the religious identity journey and ultimate disaffiliation with Christianity was mentioned impact respondent’s mental health in approximately a quarter of responses. Impact on one’s mental health was not identified as a reason for disaffiliating with Christianity, rather many reflected or self-identified that their mental health improved after choosing to no longer self-identify as Christian. Respondents observed that this was primarily attributed to letting go of the guilt and shame that a Christian life-style framework had placed upon them.

Rules and Traditions

The continued ascription to Christian rules and traditions were explored within the qualitative component of the survey. Christian traditions and/or rules differ in their perception and definition across denominations and communities. Traditions may be perceived as behaviours around religious events such as Easter and Christmas or other behaviours such as communion and baptism. Christian rules lay on a continuum which can begin with basic moral code, such as do not steal or murder, through to Christian specific rules defined by literal biblical teaching or biblical interpretation entrenched through generations, such as ‘no sex before marriage’ or ‘marry a Christian’. Due to the differing interpretations of traditions and rules dependent on individual circumstances, the researcher did not provide pre-determined

definitions for the respondents. The majority of participants stated that they no longer held onto any traditions or rules, whilst approximately a quarter of respondents specified, they held only holiday season traditions such as Christmas. Individuals that identified that they retained Christian traditions and rules, specified examples which aligned with societal norms, such as do not lie or murder, while fewer respondents stated that they still engage in Christian-related rituals such as reading the bible, prayer and listening to Christian music.

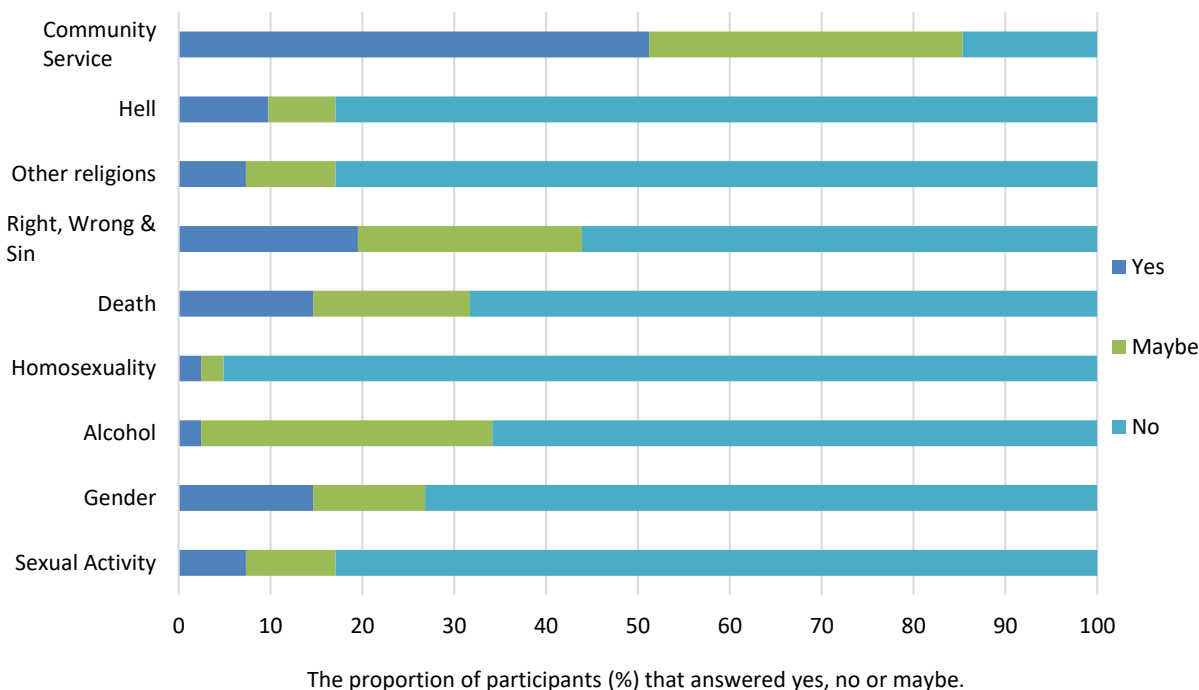
The primary traditions or rules from Christianity no longer ascribed to by participants were restrictions regarding the parameters of sexual activity, such as abstaining from sex before marriage and the exclusion of or disaffiliation with the LGBTQI community. Regular Christian associated activities such as, attending church, prayer, reading the bible and tithing, were no longer ascribed to by several participants, in contrast to above, in which some still engaged in a few activities. Participants stated that Christian traditions and rules regarding drinking or consuming alcohol were no longer a part of their lives. Some individuals went a step further to state they no longer ascribed to or held onto any traditions or rules from Christianity.

Current Agreement with Religious Teaching on Specific Topics

An important component within this research to explore was how participants currently aligned themselves with their previous religious teachings or experiences. Quantitative data was sought on predetermined topics including community service, hell, other religions, right/wrong/sin, death, homosexuality, alcohol, gender, and sexual activity. These topics were selected by the researcher upon examination of themes identified within the scholarship. Respondents were then asked to determine, how their life experiences aligned on the afore mentioned topics with the religious teachings received and which of the topics contributed them no longer identifying as Christian.

Figure 15

The proportion of participants that currently agree with what they were taught or what they experienced within their religious context regarding the following topics: community service, hell, other religions, right/wrong/sin, death, homosexuality, alcohol, gender, and sexual activity.

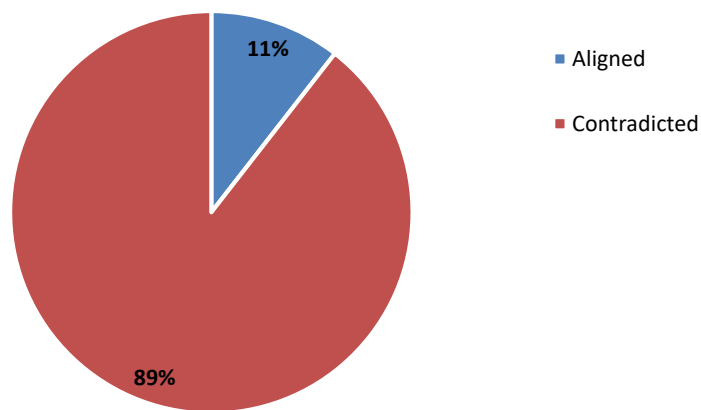


Participants were asked whether, at the time of the survey, they agreed with their teaching and experiences within their respective religious backgrounds regarding numerous topics, as seen in figure 15. Within the majority of topics, participants indicated that they no longer agreed with the religious teaching in that area. The highest topic of disagreement was teaching on homosexuality with 95% of respondents indicating they disagreed within the teaching or experiences in their religious context. Teaching regarding hell, sexual activity, and other religions were also identified as topics in which a high proportion of participants, 83%, currently disagreed with what they experienced or were taught within a religious context. Community service was identified as the only topic in which participants currently either fully, 51%, or partially, 34%, agreed with what they had been previously taught within a religious context.

Close to 90% of participants, as seen in figure 16, found that their life experiences contradicted what religious teaching they had received on the topics identified in figure 15. The religious teachings and experiences within a religious context had a significant influence on participants' decision to disaffiliate with Christianity, with 82.9% indicating yes, it did contribute, and 17.1% indicating no.

Figure 16

The proportion of participants whose life experiences and values, contradicted or aligned with the religious teachings and experiences on the afore mentioned topics, in figure 15.



Qualitative data was collected by asking participants to specify which views, teaching, or experiences, identified in figure 15, contributed to the individual no longer self-identify with Christianity. Participants' answers were thematically categorized and then ranked according to popularity; table three indicates the themes most commonly mentioned to those least mentioned. Although scientific teachings were not proposed by the researcher within figure 15, participants self-identified the conflict between religious belief and scientific teachings as a reason for disaffiliating with Christianity. This factor is likely underrepresented within table three due to the lack of prompting by the researcher for participant consideration.

Table 3

Thematical reasons for participants no-longer self-identifying with Christianity, listed from most popular/commonly mentioned to least popular/commonly mentioned.

Popularity	
1	Sexual activity and sexual ethics.
2	Homosexuality. LGBTQI community.
3	The concept of hell.
4	Expectation of fulfilling stereotypical gender roles.
5	The concept of actions, opinions or ideas being right or wrong, the introduction of sin as a result.
6	Views regarding alcohol consumption.
7	The conflict with science and religious belief.

Reasons for Disaffiliation with Christianity

The primary open-ended qualitative question asked within the survey was, "what made you decide to no longer identify with Christianity"? A variety of responses were received and coded thematically, which uncovered saturation of three key themes related to a primary/overarching theme of

irreconcilable dissonance or conflict. The three key themes were: moral and/or societal conflict, scientific or intellectual conflict and general church and/or Christianity conflict. Responses coded to each theme also revealed subgroups regarding topics that respondents consistently discussed. Table four provides a breakdown of each key theme and their related subgroups. Respondents' answers typically crossed a variety of themes and subgroups, with each response typically touching upon two or more sub-group topics.

Table 4

The three key themes and corresponding subgroups in which participants' reasoning, for no longer identifying as Christian, could be attributed to.

Church or Christianity Conflict.	Moral and Societal Conflict	Scientific or Intellectual Conflict
Abuse witnessed or experienced: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Verbal - Sexual 	LGBTQI: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political stance - Belief of right versus wrong. 	Negative view held of science and scientific teachings.
Judgmental environment or nature of Christians.	Sexual activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sex education - Purity culture 	Further education obtained from others or self-taught lead to dissonance.
Manipulation.	Gender: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Application of stereotypical gender roles. - Views on gender. 	No observable or factual evidence to support God or Christianity.
Unanswered prayer or perceived absent God.	Racism and Colonialism	Creationism versus evolution.
Injustice or 'bad' events occurring in the world – how could God let this happen?	Political stance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Right wing views held by churches and Christians. 	Questions unanswered by people of faith.
Faith healing.		
Christian based rules.		
Heaven, hell, and death		
Biblical inconsistencies.		

Chapter four provided a summation of the results obtained from surveying young adults aged 20 to 30 years from New Zealand that had experienced a significant change in their religious identity. This chapter began by outlining the demographic details of participants, followed by establishing their childhood religiosity and exploring at what age their religious identity began to change and what the religious makeup of their friends and family were at each time point. Participants self-identified positions on Christian beliefs, values, traditions and rules and their current degree of agreement on religious teachings were presented, and subsequently, the qualitative data identified thematic reasons why participants disaffiliated with Christianity. Three key themes were identified via axial coding: societal and moral conflict, scientific or intellectual conflict, and conflict with the Church or Christianity. Selective coding identified that each key theme can be linked and attributed to the central theme, cognitive dissonance. Chapter five will seek to discuss and explore the key findings presented above in the context of the previously mentioned themes and subsequently refer to the literature findings.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The primary purpose of this thesis is to gain insight into the factors influencing the decline in religious identity/affiliation with Christianity, among white/Pākehā New Zealand young adults aged 20 to 30 years. Secondary research questions, created with the intention of gaining greater insight into the primary purpose of this research, included: What role have Christian values, beliefs, rules, and traditions played in an individual's disaffiliation with Christianity? Did participants experience a contradiction between the values, beliefs, rules, and traditions taught to them throughout childhood and their subsequent life experiences? Did this contradiction influence an individual's change in religious identity or disaffiliation with Christianity?

The following writing will draw upon the findings within the literature and data obtained via surveying the target population to seek to explain the factors influencing religious change in young adults within NZ. The findings suggest that participants detailed similar themes, regarding the tensions found between their childhood religious teaching and subsequent lived experiences. Whilst participants did not specify their experienced tension as cognitive dissonance, their responses articulated aspects of this process. Thus the overarching theme that links respondents' reasons for disaffiliating with Christianity is the social-psychological theory cognitive dissonance, this will be discussed further below, with a specific exploration of conflicts experienced within three subsections: general church or Christianity, scientific or intellectual, and moral or political conflicts. This chapter will conclude with proposed areas of future study and final remarks from the author, indicating the potential societal impacts of the research findings.

Critical to this discussion, especially as it relates to religion in NZ, is the role of secularism. Unlike countries such as the United States, NZ is known for its efforts of separating religion and governmental operations, since its infancy. In contrast, throughout NZ's history the majority of New Zealander's self-

identified as Christian; however, in 2013, the NZ census indicated that the nation was undergoing a change in religious identity with the majority of census respondents no longer identifying with Christianity. To be religious in NZ is a different experience to international cohorts, religious New Zealander's live within a secular society, and although participants that are disaffiliated from Christianity may have experienced social sanctions from family or their respective religious communities, respondents are unlikely to have been exposed to societal sanctions. Within the context of this study, it is important to note that respondents did not reveal widespread pushback in response to changing their self-identified religious beliefs or lack thereof. The Christian world view on science, moral, and political issues is arguably not the view held by the majority of New Zealander's, evident by the 2013 census, thus when participants were disaffiliating with Christianity when experiencing cognitive dissonance, they are affiliating to a non-religious world view that the majority of New Zealanders hold.

Cognitive Dissonance

The social psychological theory of cognitive dissonance describes the conflicts an individual may encounter such as; unreconcilable intellectual, biblical or theological, scientific and moral or political conflict. Cognitive dissonance is the internal, intellectual, or mental conflict an individual is aware of and experiences when different behaviors, experiences or beliefs do not align, but both hold true for that individual (Chase, 2013; Jong, 2011; Longest & Uecker, 2018; Uecker et al., 2007). The literature does not describe cognitive dissonance as the 'straw that breaks the camel's back in regard to disaffiliating with Christianity, rather it is an internal conflict that creates an increasing degree of discomfort and anxiety for the individual as they attempt to reconcile differing values, morals or beliefs, becoming a catalyst for the eventual loss of faith (Chase, 2013; Fisler et al., 2009; Ross, 2009; Uecker et al., 2007; Wagstaff, 2004).

Secularisation is an important component of cognitive dissonance, for it encompasses the exposure to secular and differing world views (Chase, 2013).

In the Christian context, cognitive dissonance occurs when one holds a Christian belief system but then life experiences, learned knowledge or other beliefs conflict with the Christian belief or world view, thus typically will only occur for individuals that are familiar with religious teachings, usually learnt from church services or gatherings (Uecker et al., 2007). Wager, Chase, Schaffner, Fisler, Uecker and Ross have found evidence of “some form of cognitive dissonance as the impetus for leaving theistic structures,” with deviant behaviours correlating with less religious attendance, particularly for young adults (Chase, 2013; Fisler et al., 2009; Ross, 2009; Schaffner, 2017; Wagstaff, 2004, p.3). Interestingly, persons from inflexible religious backgrounds “may experience difficulty in reconciling their knowledge of outsiders with their religion; while some succeed, others break away from their religion, exploring alternatives as a way to combat the cognitive dissonance” (Schaffner, 2017).

“Early adulthood is a time of elevated exposure to — and participation in — behaviours such as binge drinking (Perkins 1987), drug use (Engs and Mullen 1999), and nonmarital sex (Zaleski and Schiaffino 2000), each of which tends to be out of step with the teachings and expectations of most American religious traditions. For some young adults this creates cognitive dissonance — the gap between what they are doing and what they think they ought to be doing. Such dissonance may lead them to distance themselves from organized religion, ascribe less importance to religion, or disassociate from religion altogether. Support for this theory is mixed, but the power of cognitive dissonance certainly varies across religious traditions” (Uecker et al., 2007, p. 1679).

Throughout life experiences and engagement with non-religious social circles, an individual may be exposed to numerous behaviours or views that they struggle to reconcile with their belief system. The literature has identified common themes, but extensive research is required to obtain a clearer picture of the issues or factors that young adults identify as the primary reason for losing their faith, particularly within the N.Z. context (Wagstaff, 2004). Themes identified within the literature include the inefficacy of prayer to obtain desired outcomes or unanswered prayer in times of distress or need (Wagstaff, 2004). Individuals also describe taking issue with reconciling Christian teachings regarding love and understanding with how religious groups have, traditionally, negatively treated homosexual people, including their own interactions with homosexual people being in contradiction to their expectations from the religious backgrounds (Wagstaff, 2004). Lastly, one's sexual impulses have been indicated to create cognitive dissonance, with particular regard to expected behaviour as a religious individual versus the impulses or feelings and individual experiences (Wagstaff, 2004).

Cognitive dissonance was an overarching theme articulated by participants as a primary reason for disaffiliating with Christianity, with 89% of participants stating that their life experiences contradicted the religious beliefs, values, and rules they were taught as children. Whilst only one respondent used the term 'cognitive dissonance' to describe their reasons for disaffiliation, other respondents provided answers which could be ascribed to cognitive dissonance. One respondent stated:

"Eventually I wound up compartmentalizing my world experiences and the Christian teachings - and never shall the two meet -, I would actively learn about scientific ideas such as evolutionand consider them rational and logical ... however, trying to reconcile the two was impossible".

Similar to literature findings, the most commonly identified conflicts for NZ young adults were regarding: the church or Christianity, scientific and/or intellectual, and moral or political conflicts.

The natural reaction a person experiences when encountering cognitive dissonance is to first engage “in fairly sophisticated mental gymnastics, creating unconscious safeguards that allowed them to preserve their beliefs in the face of contradictory scientific, philosophical or ‘gut-sense’ evidence” (Ross, 2009, p. 87). This was supported by findings from this thesis with one participant stating – *“once I started to question and weigh up my actual experiences in the world, Christianity started to crumble around me”*. The academic scholarship describes that for individuals “cognitively, many cannot reconcile what they have learned outside of church with lessons taught inside church” which creates a circumstance of compartmentalisation (Chase, 2013, p. 19). However, this compartmentalisation of beliefs is not a long-term solution to the discomfort and anxiety an individual may encounter. To this end, conclusions must be sought which may influence the individual to disaffiliate with Christianity or lose their faith. The emotional impact of cognitive dissonance on a person’s mental health is an under-recognised component in an individual’s religious identity journey.

Cognitive dissonance as a primary reason for the increasing incidence of NZ young adults, aged 20 to 30 years, disaffiliating with Christianity will now be further explored regarding the topic of conflicts identified by participants. Special attention is devoted to exploring both the moral and political aspects driving these experiences.

Moral or Political Conflict

The academic scholarship regarding contemporary young adult disaffiliation with Christianity identifies the views held by Christians or the Church surrounding moral and political issues as a leading contributing factor to individuals disaffiliating with Christianity (Edgell, n.d.; Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2011; Schaffner, 2017; Shibley, 1998; Uecker & Froese, 2019; Vaughn, 2016). Cognitive dissonance regarding moral and political issues were cited as the spark that introduced the first doubts or misgivings regarding Christianity, although these issues were not considered the ultimate reason for disaffiliating with Christianity, it encouraged individuals to further explore their religious identity (Schaffner, 2017).

The research conducted for this thesis supports previous findings within the academic scholarship, with cognitive dissonance regarding Christian views on moral and political issues identified as the primary reason for NZ young adults disaffiliating with Christianity. The moral and political conflict was identified within the qualitative and quantitative data as consistently causing the greatest dissonance with respondents identifying numerous topics in which contributed to disaffiliation with Christianity, including Christians'/the Church's views on sexual activity and purity culture, gender norms and roles, LGBTQI views, and political stance. During their formative years, participants were exposed to conservative values typical to the EPC churches, regarding moral and political issues, such as homosexuality; however, their life experiences as a teenager and young adult introduced conflict between their childhood teachings and experiences, leading to a state of cognitive dissonance. Participants described experiencing guilt, shame, and negative mental health effects due to their inability to reconcile their moral and political conflicts.

Sexual Activity/Sexuality and Sexual Ethics

Respondents were asked to identify the reason why they choose to disaffiliate with Christianity. Demonstrated in table three, Christian views on sexual activity/sexuality and sexual ethics were the most commonly identified reason for disaffiliation with Christianity for NZ young adults, followed by views on homosexuality and the LGBTQI community. Interestingly, when the data was stratified by gender, over 60% of female respondents directly identified the moral conflict of Christian views and teachings on sexual activity/sexuality as a leading factor in their decision to disaffiliate with Christianity. Over half of the female respondents (82%), at the time of the survey, disagreed with their childhood religious teachings on sexual activity/sexuality, demonstrated in figure 15. Christian attitudes towards sexual activity and the emphasis place on a purity culture, was described by many participants as psychologically damaging, one respondent stated that they *“disliked the monitoring of [their] ‘modesty’ and the lack of positive conversations about women’s sexuality and agency.”* Whilst others likened purity culture *“to a cult that led to social pressures, bullying by peers and Church youth leaders, and the suppression of female sexuality.”* Another participant stated, *“I just generally hated the Christian attitude toward sex and sexuality, and how demeaning it was to both men and women.”* Participants’ exposure to religious teachings on sexuality and subsequent life experiences introduced cognitive dissonance into participants’ belief system and the failure to reconcile the two, for many, ultimately lead to the change in religious identity.

The moral conflict of Christian views on gender roles, particularly female, were identified by some participants as connected to the previous discussion of sexuality and purity culture, stating these attitudes and values propagated gender role expectations. The Church was not an environment that promoted the ideals of modern women; rather there were *“incredibly strong undertones of gender roles within the church,”* with particular emphasis placed on the development towards becomes a *“Proverbs 32 woman”*

and participants that questioned this expectation experienced social sanctions and were made to feel as an “outsider.” Women experienced cognitive dissonance from their personal fight for equality and agency and the Church teachings on the gender role expectations of women.

The academic scholarship supports the finding that moral conflict regarding sexuality and sexual activity is identified as a primary reason for young adult American millennials for changing their religious identity and no longer self-identifying as Christian (Gillette, 2015, 2017; Uecker & Froese, 2019; Vaughn, 2016). This research revealed that this topic of moral conflict significantly impacts female young adults, and the emphasis placed on female modesty, sexuality and the perpetuation of purity culture has been indicated within this thesis research to be psychologically damaging for respondents, further research is required to explore the extent of psychological damage and the evolving consequences for respondents’ sexuality.

Homosexuality

The Church’s and Christian views on homosexuality and the LGBTQI community were heavily criticized by participants and were identified as a leading factor in their decision to no longer self-identify as Christian, demonstrated in table three. The Christian view on homosexuality and the LGBTQI community was defined by participants as; homosexuality is wrong, there are only two genders, male and female, and genders are unchangeable. One participant described being taught that persons of the LGBTQI community had “*demons*” and/or “*unresolved trauma*,” whilst another respondent shared the memory of how “*badly*” their parents would react when LGBTQI issues appeared on the national 6 pm news. The qualitative data indicated that participants had vastly different life experiences regarding homosexuality and the LGBTQI community, when compared with their childhood religious teachings and

95% of respondents stated that they now disagreed with their childhood teachings, demonstrated in figure 15. The moral conflict of homosexuality and the LGBTQI community provides an example of unreconcilable moral cognitive dissonance experienced by participants, this internal conflict was aptly described by one participant who stated they struggled to reconcile how a loving God could send individuals to hell, merely for being who they were i.e., homosexual. Interestingly one participant had considered returning to Christianity, but the primary barrier was the inability to find a “*gay-affirming*” church. This issue introduced political conflict for some participants, with examples given of openly right-wing Christians and/or Churches supporting or gifting money to anti-LGBTQI programs. Christian or religious institution views on homosexuality and the LGBTQI community were identified within the American scholarship as a factor leading individuals’ to disaffiliated with Christianity. The findings from this thesis support this finding (Uecker & Froese, 2019; Vaughn, 2016).

Finally, it is important to recognise many participants identified that the cognitive dissonance from the discussed moral conflicts had a detrimental effect on their physical and mental health; respondents identified this as a result of the shame, depression, anxiety, and depression experienced due to these moral conflicts. Furthermore disaffiliation with Christianity, removal from an environment with conservative views and the acceptance into a community that supported the individual, vastly improved participant mental health. Participants experienced cognitive dissonance between religious teachings, God loves all people, and the conservative view of Christians and as a consequence their actions towards homosexuals and those within the LGBTQI community.

The primary factor identified within this research leading to NZ young adults disaffiliating with Christianity was moral and political cognitive dissonance. The particular moral issues raised by participants

were the Christian view on sexuality, the perpetuation of purity culture and gender roles, and the perception and treatment of homosexuals and the LGBTQI community.

General Church or Christianity Conflicts

Cognitive dissonance was apparent within the broader key sub-theme of general Church and Christianity related conflicts. These conflicts were described by participants as pertaining to: Christians are judgemental, their use of manipulation, unanswered prayer, an absent God, injustice or bad events, super-natural/faith healings and biblical inconsistencies.

Judgement and Manipulation

It is not uncommon for Christians to be perceived by society as a judgmental community, largely in response to the strong conservative views regarding contemporary moral issues voiced by Christians throughout history. A long-touted, common critique of Christianity is that individuals disaffiliate with their faith because Christians and the church are determined to be a judgmental place, which imposes its views and opinions on others. When millennials were asked by researchers as why they felt alienated either within or by the church, it was linked with the concept of judgementalism, regarding a variety of different issues (Vaughn, 2016). Christian participants within a study by Dravitzki (2015) discussed that they believe the judgmental Christian was an inaccurate stereotype given to the church by society; ironically, within this same study, participants that held socially liberal positions or views stated that they often felt judged by their Christian peers (Dravitzki, 2015). The level of judgment experienced by individuals was considered to be different between the sexes, with women experiencing harsher criticisms or judgement, than their male counterparts (Pearce et al., 2019). The judgmental perception of Christians is a commonly accepted reason within the literature, for individuals to no longer self-identify as Christian, the findings from the research for this thesis revealed a similar trend.

During the examination of participant's taught beliefs and values, a dissonance between lived experiences and childhood teaching was revealed. Participants commonly reported that the only taught value from Christianity they still ascribed to was *"the golden rule,"* to love and care for others. Although this love-based teaching was emphasised within participants' upbringing, their life experiences of judgemental or manipulative Christians, contradicted this teaching. The perceptions of Christians or the Church as manipulative largely pertained to the methods used to convert other persons to Christianity. For example, the traumatic life event of a participant's grandmother passing away, was utilised as an opportunity to attempt to *"convert the family to Christianity."* One participant described that *"the church is full of judgemental people who don't accept other for who they are,"* whilst another participant described *"I also struggle with the church's preaching of love your neighbour, help others out, we're all equal but not seeing this in practice"* rather their lived experience was more likely to be *"love your neighbours, means only those you like."* The findings from this research frequently revealed participant experiences in which participants found more people that had strong morals, and were kind, loving and less judgemental outside of the Church and Christianity than within religious circles.

Sin and Hell

The judgement of Christians was frequently described as being directed at the LGBTQI community, leading to the second church/Christian based conflict identified by participants as contributing to their disaffiliation with Christianity, the concept of sin, and the consequence of sinful behaviour as hell. The Christian concepts of sin and hell were the third most commonly identified factors that contributed to NZ young adults disaffiliating with Christianity. Christians were described by participants as judging sexual orientations other than heterosexual as sinful; however, respondents frequently described meeting good, kind, loving and caring members of the LGBTQI community, and

struggling to reconcile with a faith that judged their sexual orientation as sinful, and subsequently these 'good people' would eventually 'go to hell', ultimately creating a cognitive dissonance tension. Participants stated they were unable to reconcile the *"idea that nice people outside of our faith went to hell but mean, judgemental ones within the faith did not"*. This regard was also extended to people born into communities or circumstances which inherently results in them being destined to hell, such as untouchable populations. One participant struggled to reconcile the idea of *"the sheer number of people on earth born in different circumstances who were therefore destined for hell."* The intellectual tension regarding hell was further complicated when participants explored that hell was a socially constructed concept within Christianity and *"much of what Christians believe comes from socialisation or simply making things up, for example the picture of hell or the save your soul prayer."*

Unanswered Prayer, Injustice and Biblical Inconsistencies

Alternative general church or Christian conflict themes revealed within the qualitative data as contributing factors to participants disaffiliation with Christianity were: unanswered prayer, an absent God, injustice or bad events occurring with the world, faith healing and biblical inconsistencies. Commonly held values and beliefs taught and held by Christians and churches, particularly EPC churches, is that 'God is personal', 'answers prayer', 'is all knowing and all powerful' and that 'the bible is the word of God and is inerrant'. The qualitative data revealed significant cognitive dissonance between childhood teachings and participants subsequent life experiences on values and beliefs mentioned above. For one participant, this dissonance was discussed in the context of a life experience in which a family member had a disability, was told by Christians that God would heal the family if the participant prayed for healing: however, no healing was bestowed, this series of events contributed to their eventual disaffiliation with Christianity. Unanswered prayer was also connected to participants stating they were unable to reconcile how a 'loving

God' could exist and allow millions of people to die of starvation, preventable illnesses, childhood cancer, to be murdered, and allow horrific events to occur, such as the holocaust or torture.

Biblical inconsistencies and the resulting intellectual conflict were identified by participants as a contributing factor in their decision to disaffiliate with Christianity. This tension is likely particularly present for participants that experienced an EPC approach to the bible, as the 'literal word of God' and thus infallible and inerrant. Participants described undertaking personal research to reconcile their growing disagreement with Christianity and found "*scripture was innate with contradictions*", and the bible was "*fallible*" with a "*number of inconsistencies*". The discord between a literal interpretation of the bible and further investigations and reflection revealed numerous circumstances in which the bible contradicted itself, this contributed to participants dissonance with their Christian belief/faith system and eventually led to them no-longer self-identifying as Christian. This finding supports previous research conducted and examined within the academic scholarship, which identified biblical inconsistency as a leading factor for individuals to disaffiliate with Christianity (Chase, 2013; Nooney, 2006; Ross, 2009; Schaffner, 2017).

Cognitive dissonance as the leading factor for disaffiliation with Christianity is exemplified within the general church, and Christian conflicts, the most commonly identified area of conflict was the concept of sin and hell: however, this also extended to the perceived judgemental nature of Christians. Values and beliefs taught within childhood regarding God's healing power and deep love for the individual was contrasted against participant life experiences resulting in cognitive dissonance, a key contributing factor in NZ young adults' decision to no longer self-identify as Christian.

Scientific and/or Intellectual Conflict

Intellectual cognitive dissonance can be exemplified within the topic of scientific or intellectual conflict experienced by an individual. Scientific conflict describes the tension individuals experience when examining scientific learnings or findings and then appraising Christianity's response to or disregard for these findings. In comparison, intellectual conflict conceptualises the internal examination of one's belief system an individual may undertake and then attempt to reconcile with academic learnings or life experiences. The qualitative data collected from the survey conducted for this thesis identified that participants struggled with scientific and intellectual conflicts, which contributed to their change in religious identity and disaffiliation with Christianity, discussed further below.

Scientific Conflict

The relationship between 'the church' and science has been widely published and dogmatic conflicts were often romanticised throughout history. A "sharp dichotomy between religion and science, which Barbour (2000) summarises as biblical literalism and scientific materialism" is endorsed by those that have turned to atheism (Schaffner, 2006). In casual or intellectual conversations that explore reasons why persons may become disaffiliated with Christianity, scientific conflict is likely to be the most 'quoted' or theorised idea by the layman, that contributes to a change in religiosity. The academic scholarship supports this layman hypothesis and has found that scientific conflict is a key reason why individuals disaffiliate with Christianity or experience major doubt with their faith or belief system (Fisler et al., 2009; Ross, 2009; Schaffner, 2017).

The research conducted, within a NZ context, for the purpose of this thesis support the academic findings and participants identified scientific conflict as a factor in their decision to disaffiliate with

Christianity, particularly as they obtained *“a growing understanding of the scientific model”* and determined *“religion isn’t logical and fully compatible with science.”* Analysis of the qualitative data, and unprompted comment within quantitative data identified scientific conflict as a factor for NZ young adults disaffiliating with Christianity.

The Church and Christianity were perceived, by respondents, to hold a negative stance on the academic subject of science and scientific teachings or findings. Participants often described that the subject of science was not an academic topic respected by the Church or Christians. One participant described that although they were interested in scientific learning, they were *“actively discouraged, [by religious leaders and Christian friends] to complete further study in the field of science.....the study of science was actively seen as studying against God.”* The stance held by religious leaders and the Christian individuals within these participants lives provided the environment for which participants experienced conflict between the Christian beliefs taught to them, and the academic scientific teaching they were exposed to, particularly within the schooling environment. Participants were also unable to recall an example of Christians intertwining science within their religious belief system without a component of ignored conflict. This academic conflict was further complicated by a lack of engagement from religious leaders and persons, with one participant stating, *“I was dissatisfied with the answers being provided to my many questions.”* Numerous participants explained further their reason for no longer self-identifying as Christian was due to there being no observable, objective and factual evidence that supported the existence of a higher power.

The issue of evolution has long been identified as an issue of scientific conflict with the scholarship assessing various Christian faiths (Wagstaff, 2004; Smith, 2017; Schaffner, 2006). The research for this thesis identified the debate of creationism versus evolution as the primary unreconcilable scientific

conflict identified by participants, NZ young adults, similar to the findings of Wagstaff's (2004) phenomenological study on becoming an atheist. Cognitive dissonance was experienced by NZ young adults in this research when they were exposed to generally accepted Christian teachings on the literal seven-day creation story within religious institutions, and then subsequently taught about evolution within the schooling system and within higher education such as university. One participant described that *"Christian's use underhanded tactics to persuade people"* and that *"young earth creation [seven-day creation] does not match the scientific consensus"*. It is unsurprising that this cohort of NZ young adults identified creation versus evolution as the primary issue of scientific cognitive dissonance, due to the increasing secular nature of NZ society and schooling education programme discussed within chapter two. The NZ education system introduced the compulsory teaching of biological evolution within the scientific curriculum in 2007, which coincides with the timeframe in which participants would have been engaged with secondary school education.

Intellectual Conflict

The concept of intellectual conflict explores the scenario in which an individual engages in critical, systematic and/or logical thinking or reasoning to examine their faith and is unable to reconcile their belief system with their critical analysis (Barber, 1973; Chase, 2013; Fisler et al., 2009; Nooney, 2006; Ross, 2009; Schaffner, 2017; Wagstaff, 2004). Different from experiencing conflict from scientific, biblical, or theological evidence, intellectual conflict is the personal, internal examination of one's belief system, and thus should be considered separately from unreconcilable experiences or moral/political ideas one is exposed to. Intellectual curiosity may encourage an individual to examine other religions or entertain the concept of holding no religion at all (Schaffner, 2017). Some individuals "felt conflicted between logical or scientific reasoning and faith, while others were content to use their logical scepticism to help them

think through questions of spirituality and faith” (Fisler et al., 2009, p. 267). It should not be disregarded that external factors such as education, network effects or experiences, some individuals describing ‘losing friends’ when attempting to engage in intellectual conversation, can also play a role in individuals disaffiliating with religion; however, separate from the evidence presented to an individual, personal and philosophical thought can play a strong role in individuals being unable to reconcile their belief system with their critical thought (Wagstaff, 2004).

Qualitative research conducted in America uncovered intellectual conflict as a reason for millennials quitting church, losing their faith or becoming disaffiliated with religion, particularly Christianity (Barber, 1973; Chase, 2013; Fisler et al., 2009; Nooney, 2006; Ross, 2009; Schaffner, 2017; Wagstaff, 2004). The “journey for some, that eventually changed their religious identification, was that they intellectualised and started to look logically and began questioning the tenants of Christian faith and dogma” (Wagstaff, 2004, p. 36). For millennials, the process of undertaking the intellectual examination of one’s faith is further complicated by some religious groups, described as anti-intellectual, discouraging individuals from undertaking critical thought, rather one should have ‘faith’ and be able to reconcile their internal conflict to ‘blind faith’, and deep examination is even regarded as ‘dangerous’ (2018) (Saxton, 1997; Stacey, 2013; Stroope et al., 2015). A proportion of biblical literalists argue that even the idea of intellectual attainment through educational achievement is ‘sinful, prideful idolisation’ that poses a subtle threat to one’s religious identity (Stroope et al., 2015). In addition to this argument, the intellectual process of rationalism presents challenges to fundamentalist type teaching or thinking and thus can be discouraged (Saxton, 1997).

The academic scholarship provides significant evidence for the role of intellectual conflict as a factor influencing an individual’s ultimate change in religious identity. The research conducted for this

thesis provides further this evidence, during the analysis of qualitative answers provided by participants it was apparent that the majority of participants had undertaken internal analysis of their Christian faith, and eventually found unreconcilable conflict, which subsequently determining their change in religious identity. Participants described spending significant periods of time intellectually engaged within themselves, questioning ideals, issues, beliefs and undertaking research and learning to attempt to answer these internal dilemmas. Participants articulated that they could no longer accept the concept of *“blind faith or the idea of believing something just because I was told to”* and described the intellectual process as *“I began to think with my own brain.”* Others *“started to question how relevant and true all the things [they] were brought up on were”* and felt their *“thinking is very different to what I grew up with.”*

The internal intellectual undertaken by participants is aptly described with the follow participant life stories.

“I spent an enormous amount of effort learning the apologetics, eventually I ran out of energy for defending my world view and just sat with my doubt instead of finding more literature that would help me reason it away.”

“The more I researched and read to try and back up my faith, the more I learned that things I had been taught weren’t true or were quite different. Studying psychology also showed me how most “spiritual experiences” are just products of our own mind. Eventually I came to realize and accept that Christianity wasn’t true.”

Another participant described that they felt a sense of intellectual freedom when attending university, as it provided an environment and platform where the participant could undertake a process of

“questioning and exploring thoughts” without fear of judgement. University was a considered a turning point for a number of participants, with one respondent articulating:

“[At university] I was surrounded by people that didn’t just confirm the way I was brought up. But actually allowed me to properly question and explore my thoughts without judgement. I was given the freedom to truly explore who I am and what I believe.”

Topics mentioned by participants in which questions were raised included, but were not limited to; psychology, scientific concepts, church history, creation of the bible, and education and research on morals, philosophy, and rational thought. The NZ young adults that completed the research survey for this survey scored highly when assessing childhood religiosity, indicating that Christianity and Christian teachings were a central part of their upbringing. However, participants described that there was a lack of environment available to them throughout their development where they could intellectually examine their faith and belief system, ultimately placing the participant in a position of unreconcilable intellectual conflict leading to the deconstruction of their faith and disaffiliation with Christianity.

In summary, data analysis revealed cognitive dissonance as the overarching factor that lead NZ young adults to disaffiliate with Christianity. Experiences of cognitive dissonance could be attributed to three main themes: moral and political conflict, general church and Christianity conflict, and scientific and intellectual conflict. The most commonly identified factors identified by participants that contributed to their change in religious identity were: the judgement and ascription of sin to the LGBTQI community, religious teachings on sexuality, gender roles and the psychologically harmful effects of purity culture, particularly for female respondents, the concept of sin and hell, and religious institutions disregard and disrespect for scientific learnings.

Opportunity for Future Research

The sociological examination of the declining rate of self-identification with Christianity within NZ young adults has been a neglected area of sociological research. Although internationally there is evidence of declining rates of religiosity, NZ serves as an interesting case study due to its secular history and separation of government and religion. The academic scholarship consists of research conducted outside of the NZ context and provides several factors identified to have contributed to the declining religiosity of young adults; however, no research has validated these proposed factors within the NZ population. As a result, the research conducted for the purpose of this thesis required a broad methodology that cast a wide net, order to capture all potential factors NZ young adults identified as contributing to disaffiliation with Christianity. The broad approach to data collection allowed the identification of important factors identified by participants, such as cognitive dissonance, but it did not allow an in-depth examination of the noted factors. Future research should be conducted to explore the effect of cognitive dissonance and its sub themes, moral, political, Christian, scientific and intellectual conflict, on individuals and their individual impact on NZ society. This thesis identified that the religious portrayal, teachings, and emphasis placed on sexuality, purity culture and gender roles were psychologically damaging for female participants, the long-term psychological impact these teachings had on NZ young adult females should be examined further within a safe and supportive environment. The data collected for the purposes of this research provide the foundation for further, more in-depth study to be undertaken within this area.

A theme/factor identified within the academic scholarship as having a strong effect on young adult religiosity was the network effect. Within these thesis findings, it was noted that participants did not openly acknowledge the influence their network or peers had on their religious identity. Figure 14A and 14B clearly indicate that participants had friendships and surrounded themselves with people that expressed similar views, both during their time identifying as Christian and after disaffiliation. An

argument could be made that a network effect contributed to respondents' change in religious identity; however, participants failed to identify this as a contributing factor within the qualitative results. It could be proposed that the data presented in figure 14A, and B merely demonstrated respondents embedding themselves within a new community after their transition away from Christianity and does not indicate a network effect. Further research is required to explore the influence of network effect on NZ young adults' decision to change their religious identity.

Interestingly, views on and the influence of Jesus on change in religious identity were glaringly absent from participant responses. Only one participant referred to Jesus within their qualitative responses, and they took issue that Jesus did not rebuke the teachings and views of the Old Testament and thus by default, accepted the Old Testament views. Jesus and His teachings are a central element within the Christian faith, thus the absence of Jesus contributing to a change in religious identity is an important consideration and should be explored further in future research.

The impact of a change in religious identity on an individual's mental health, was an incidental finding within this research. Approximately a quarter of participants commented that engagement with Christianity and religion had a negative impact on their mental health, and respondent experienced a significantly positive improvement as a result of disaffiliating with Christianity. This was largely attributed to the concept of being able to let go of the guilt and shame they had attained, and others described a feeling of weight being lifted from their shoulders and a joy in the freedoms they experienced. Further research within a safe environment is required to explore and evaluate the long-term impact religion has on an individual's mental health, and to understand the effect of cognitive dissonance between taught Christian views, moral and beliefs, and NZ teenager and young adult life experiences.

Conclusions

The primary purpose of this thesis was to gain insight into the factors influencing the decline in religious identity/affiliation with Christianity among white/Pākehā New Zealand young adults aged 20 to 30 years. The examination of the young adult declining rates of religiosity has been a largely neglected field of study within the NZ context for the last 30 years. At its foundation, NZ is considered to be a largely secular state, in which religion has little direct power within the running of government. NZ has undergone societal change regarding religious identity, beginning in the 1960's; however, the modern examination of the decline has not been evaluated. This thesis sought to begin to identify the factors contributing to this rapid decline in self-identification with Christianity and provide the basis for future research and examination.

The overarching themes identified as the primary contributing factors for NZ young adults disaffiliating with Christianity was the influence of cognitive dissonance and the inability for participants to reconcile their childhood religious teachings with subsequent life experiences as a teenager and young adult. Over 80% of participants identified a contradiction between their life experiences and the religious teaching they received on Christian beliefs and values, thus the irrelevance of religious teaching became a contributing factor in disaffiliation with Christianity. Participant experiences of cognitive dissonance could be classified within three main subthemes: moral and political conflict, general church and Christian conflict, and scientific and intellectual conflict. The significance and implications of these findings and research, is that it gives people a voice and provides a space in which their story could be share, provides others with the opportunity to hear a story, which may be relatable to their circumstances, and to provide the research for Christians and Churches to learn from to engage and adapt their belief system within a secular-modern society.

In conclusion, for White/Pakeha NZ young adults aged 20 to 30 years who have undergone a change in religious identity, Christianity was found to be both irrelevant and in conflict with living within a secular society. Their life experiences within a secular New Zealand were not able to be reconciled with their religious teachings receive during childhood and within youth-based Christian communities on the Christian view morals, science, intellectual thought, biblical and general Christian beliefs and values.

REFERENCES

- About Us | Family First NZ.* (n.d.). Retrieved February 18, 2021, from <https://www.familyfirst.org.nz/about-us/>
- Ahdar, R. (2013). Is Secularism Neutral? *Ratio Juris*, 26(3), 404–429. <https://doi.org/10.1111/RAJU.12020>
- Ahdar, R., Boston, J., Donovan, P., Lineham, P., Lynch, P., & Stenhouse, J. (2000). *God and Government: The New Zealand Experience: Vol. ISBN 1 877* (R. Ahdar & J. Stenhouse, Eds.). University of Otago Press.
- Alan Jamieson. (n.d.). *The Future of the Church.* Reality. Retrieved July 1, 2021, from <https://www.reality.org.nz/articles/43/43-jamieson.php>
- Americans' Perception of Conflict Between Science and Religion | Pew Research Center.* (n.d.). Retrieved February 20, 2021, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2015/10/22/perception-of-conflict-between-science-and-religion/>
- Barber, L. I. (1973). *STUDENT RELIGION.*
- Berg, B.L. (2004). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (5th ed). Boston, US: Allyn & Bacon.
- Bloore, Chris., & Donovan, P. (1987). *Science and theology in action* . Dunmore Press.
- Bond, G. (2008). *EVANGELISTIC PERFORMANCE IN NEW ZEALAND: THE WORD AND WHAT IS NOT SAID.*
- Chase, J. (2013). *Why They Stop Attending Church: An Exploratory Study Of Religious Participation Decline Among Millennials From Conservative Christian Backgrounds.* <http://library.ucf.edu>
- Cook, E. A. (2016). *Spirituality, Pākehā and No Religion in Aotearoa/New Zealand:*
- Cooke, B. (2010). *Realising Secularism* (M. Wallace, Ed.). Australia New Zealand Secular Association.
- Dakin, J. (2007). *The Secular Trend in New Zealand* . NZ Association of Rationalists & Humanists and the Humanist Trust .
- Davidson, A. (1991). *Christianity in Aotearoa: A History of Church and Society in New Zealand* . Education for Ministry .

- Donaldson, K. (2016). *THE FAITH DIMENSION: A MIXED METHODS STUDY ABOUT SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION IN NEW ZEALAND YOUNG PEOPLE*.
- Dravitzki, T. (2015). *AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF "BEING RELIGIOUS" IN EMERGING ADULTS WITHIN A TERTIARY EDUCATION SETTING*.
- Edgell, P. (n.d.). *Faith and Spirituality among Emerging Adults*.
- Facebook as a research tool. (n.d.). Retrieved July 5, 2021, from <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/03/ce-corner>
- Family First NZ | Strong Families, Strong Nation. (n.d.). Retrieved February 18, 2021, from <https://www.familyfirst.org.nz/>
- Ferngren, G. B. (2002). *Science and Religion: A Historical Introduction* (Gary. B. Ferngren, Ed.; ISBN 0 801). The John Hopkins University Press.
- Fisler, J., Agati, H. A., Chance, S. M., Donahue, A. E., Donahue, G. A., Eickhoff, E. J., Kolb Gastler, S. E., Lowder, J. C., & Foubert, J. D. (2009). *Experience and Resolution of Spiritual Struggle Keeping (or Losing) the Faith: Reflections on Spiritual Struggles and Their Resolution by College Seniors* (Vol. 27, Issue 2).
- Fowler, J. W. (1991). Stages in Faith Consiousness. *New Directions For Child Development*, 52, 27–45.
- Franz, D., Marsh, H. E., Chen, J. I., & Teo, A. R. (2019). Using facebook for qualitative research: A brief primer. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 21(8). <https://doi.org/10.2196/13544>
- Gillette, T. M. (2015). *WOMEN WHO LEFT PROTESTANT FUNDAMENTALISM Voices Reclaimed: The Lived Experience of Women who Left Protestant Fundamentalism A dissertation submitted*.
- Gillette, T. M. (2017). Voices reclaimed: The lived experience of women who left protestant fundamentalism. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering*, 78(3-B(E)), No-Specified.

<http://ovidsp.ovid.com/ovidweb.cgi?T=JS&PAGE=reference&D=psyc13&NEWS=N&AN=2017-05713-072>

- Greenfield, E. A., & Marks, N. F. (2007). Religious Social Identity as an Explanatory Factor for Associations between More Frequent Formal Religious Participation and Psychological Well-Being. In *The International journal for the psychology of religion* (Vol. 17, Issue 3). NIH Public Access. [/pmc/articles/PMC2507864/](#)
- Hill, J. P. (2008). Religious pathways during the transition to adulthood: A life course approach. In *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*.
- Hoverd, W. J., & Sibley, C. G. (2010). Religious and Denomination Diversity in New Zealand 2009. *New Zealand Sociology*, 25(2), 59–87.
- Jones, A., & Jenkins, K. (2011). *He Kōrero The Words Between Us*. Huia Publisher .
- Jong, J. (2011). *Scaring the bejesus into people: The effects of mortality salience on explicit and implicit religious belief*.
- Kinnaman, D., & Hawkins, Aly. (2011). *You lost me : why young Christians are leaving church-- and rethinking faith*. BakerBooks.
- Lineham, P. J. (2014). Trends in Religious History in New Zealand: From Institutional to Social History. *History Compass*, 12(4), 333–343. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12152>
- Liu, J. (2011, December 19). *Christian Movements and Denominations*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-movements-and-denominations/>
- Long, V. (2020). *Gender and Verse Religion in New Zealand Women's Poetry*.
- Longest, K. C., & Uecker, J. E. (2018). Moral Communities and Sex: The Religious Influence on Young Adult Sexual Behavior and Regret. *Sociological Perspectives*, 61(3), 361–382. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0731121417730015>

- Malloy, J. (2017). *Australian Journal of Political Science Political opportunity structures, evangelical Christians and morality politics in Canada, Australia and New Zealand*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2017.1330396>
- Marriage Bill - Open letter from Church Leaders | Scoop News*. (n.d.). Retrieved February 18, 2021, from
<https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO1303/S00114/marriage-bill-open-letter-from-church-leaders.htm>
- Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Act 2013 No 20, Public Act Contents – New Zealand Legislation. Retrieved February 18, 2021, from
<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2013/0020/latest/DLM4505003.html>
- Mayrl, D., & Uecker, J. E. (2011). Higher Education and Religious Liberalization among Young Adults. In *Social Forces* (Vol. 90, Issue 1). <https://academic.oup.com/sf/article-abstract/90/1/181/2235577>
- McGivern, R. (2014). *Chapter 15. Religion*. BCcampus.
- Moetara, S. (2012). *Mana Māori + Christianity* (H. Morrison, L. Paterson, B. Knowles, & Rae Murray, Eds.).
- Mol, H. (1922). The fixed and the fickle: Religion and identity in New Zealand. In *The Fixed and the Fickle: Religion and Identity in New Zealand*.
- New Zealand - Facebook users by age | Statista*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 5, 2021, from
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/681512/new-zealand-facebook-users-by-age/>
- Nichol, C., & Veitch, J. (Eds.). (1983). *Religion in New Zealand*. Victoria University of Wellington.
- Nooney, J. E. (2006). Keeping the faith: Religious transmission and apostasy in Generation X. In *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13398-014-0173-7.2>
- O'Malley, V. (2012). *The Meeting Place*. Auckland University Press.
- Owens, J. (2011). Protective Effects of Religious Continuity for Academic Achievement among Minorities. *Population Association of America*.

- Pearce, L. D., Uecker, J. E., & Denton, M. L. (2019). Annual Review of Sociology Religion and Adolescent Outcomes: How and Under What Conditions Religion Matters. *Annu. Rev. Sociol.*, 45, 201–222. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-073117>
- Pratt, D. (2016). Secular New Zealand and religious diversity: From cultural evolution to societal affirmation. *Social Inclusion*, 4(2), 52–64. <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v4i2.463>
- Protect Marriage NZ Protect Marriage NZ. (n.d.). Retrieved February 18, 2021, from <http://protectmarriage.org.nz/>
- Puffer, K. A. (2018). Protestant millennials, religious doubt, & The local church. *Religions*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9010008>
- Ranginui Walker (1990) Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou Struggle without end. North Shore, New Zealand: Penguin Books.
- Regnerus, M. D., Smith, C., & Smith, B. (2004). Social context in the development of adolescent religiosity. *Applied Developmental Science*, 8(1), 27–38. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0801_4
- Regnerus, M. D., & Uecker, J. E. (2006). Finding Faith, Losing Faith: The Prevalence and Context of Religious Transformations during Adolescence. In *Source: Review of Religious Research* (Vol. 47, Issue 3). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3512355>
- Regnerus, M. D., & Uecker, J. E. (2007). *How Corrosive Is College to Religious Faith and Practice?*
- Repphun, E. (2009). *Haunted: Religious Modernity and Reenchantment*.
- Ross, K. H. (2009). *LOSING FAITH IN FUNDAMENTALIST CHRISTIANITY: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS*.
- Saxton, P. J. W. bring. (1997). *The new Christian conservatism*.
- Schaffner, C. (2017). *Paths Out of Religion : A Cartography of Atheism*.
- Schulze, A. C. (2012). *Key Factors of Faith Development : the Relationship Between Family and Church Factors and Faith Development of Adolescents and Young Adults in German-Speaking Europe*.

- Schwadel, P. (2015). Explaining Cross-National Variation in the Effect of Higher Education on Religiosity. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12187>
- Schwadel, P. (2017). The Positives and Negatives of Higher Education: How the Religious Context in Adolescence Moderates the Effects of Education on Changes in Religiosity. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 56(4). <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12486>
- Shibley, M. A. (1998). American Academy of Political and Social Science Contemporary Evangelicals: Born-Again and World Affirming. In *Source: The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (Vol. 558).
- Smith, C., Denton, M. L., Faris, R., & Regnerus, M. (2002). Mapping American Adolescent Religious Participation. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 41(4), 597–612.
- Smith, N. (2013). No longer more educated: Changes amongst those of no religion in New Zealand. *New Zealand Sociology*, 28(2), 64–76.
- Stacey. (2013). *MISSIO APOSTOLICA Journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology*. www.lsfmissiology.org
- Statistics New Zealand. (1871). *Results Of A Census of New Zealand*,. https://www3.stats.govt.nz/historic_publications/1871-census/1871-results-census.html?_ga=2.198908971.521909370.1625694284-638728356.1625094699#idsect1_1_506
- Statistics New Zealand. (2019a). *Losing our religion*. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/losing-our-religion>
- Statistics New Zealand. (2019b). *Stats NZ*. Religious Affiliation (Total Responses) by Age Group and Sex, for the Census Usually Resident Population Count, 2006, 2013, and 2018 Censuses (RC, TA, SA2, DHB).
- Stroope, S., Franzen, A. B., & Uecker, J. E. (2015). Social context and college completion in the United States: The role of congregational biblical literalism. *Sociological Perspectives*, 58(1), 120–137. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0731121414559522>

- Swatos, W. H., & Christiano, K. J. (1999). Secularization Theory: The Course of a Concept. *Sociology of Religion*, 60(3), 209–228.
- Taylor, K., Piotrowski, C., Woodgate, R. L., & Letourneau, N. (2014). Child sexual abuse and adult religious life: Challenges of theory and method. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2014.960633>
- Tate, P. H. (2012). *He Puna Iti i te Ao Mārama*. Libro International.
- Troughton, G. (2016). *Sacred Histories in Secular New Zealand* (G. Troughton & S. Lange, Eds.). Victoria University Press.
- Troughton, G., Bulbulia, J., & Sibley, C. G. (2014). STRENGTH OF RELIGION AND THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCHES. *Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought and Practice*, 21(2), 26–34.
<http://nzdotstat.stats.gov>
- Troughton, G., & Hugh, M. (Eds.). (2011). *The Spirit of the past*. Victoria University Press.
- Uecker, J. E., & Ellison, C. G. (2012). *Parental Divorce, Parental Religious Characteristics, and Religious Outcomes in Adulthood*.
- Uecker, J. E., & Froese, P. (2019). Religious Individualism and Moral Progressivism: How Source of Religious Authority Is Related to Attitudes about Abortion, Same-Sex Marriage, Divorce, and Premarital Sex. In *Politics and Religion* (Vol. 12, Issue 2, pp. 283–316). Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048318000792>
- Uecker, J. E., Regnerus, M. D., & Vaaler, M. L. (2007). Losing My Religion: The Social Sources of Religious Decline in Early Adulthood. *Social Forces*, 85(4). <https://academic.oup.com/sf/article-abstract/85/4/1667/2234969>
- Vaughn, S. M. (2016). *Why Millennials are leaving the church-Thesis*.
- Wagstaff, P. (2004). *DECONVERSION : A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON BECOMING AN ATHEIST*.
- Walker, R. (1990). *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou Struggle without end*. Penguin Books.

- Ward, K. (2006). Towards 2015: The future of mainline Protestantism in New Zealand. *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 27(1), 13–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617670600594152>
- Ward, K. (2016). Religion in New Zealand since the 1960s: some sociological perspectives. In *New Zealand Sociology* (Vol. 31).
- Wilcox, W. B., Cherlin, A. J., Uecker, J. E., & Messel, M. (2012). No money, no honey, no church: The deinstitutionalization of religious life among the white working class. *Research in the Sociology of Work*, 23, 227–250. [https://doi.org/10.1108/S0277-2833\(2012\)0000023013](https://doi.org/10.1108/S0277-2833(2012)0000023013)
- Woodhead, L., Heelas, P., & Martin, D. (2013). Peter Berger and the study of religion. In *Peter Berger and the Study of Religion*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203206805>

APPENDIX: ONLINE SURVEY

An Examination of Young Adults and Religion in New Zealand

Title: An Examination of Young Adults and Religion in New Zealand

Researcher: Luke Furborough - lpf6@students.waikato.ac.nz

Supervisor: Adele Norris - adele.norris@waikato.ac.nz

Ethics approving committee: Humanethics@waikato.ac.nz

I give an assurance that the participant (you) will not be identified in any publication or dissemination of research findings.

Data will be published in Luke Furborough Master's thesis, other academic publications are possible such as journal articles and conference presentations.

By participating and completing this online survey you consent to your provided data being used in the survey (Any identifying personal information given will be anonymized prior to publication).

This Survey will take between 10-20 minutes

This masters research seeks to examine individuals aged between 20 - 30 who grew up identifying with Christianity and no longer identify with a religion, specifically Christianity, or have had a substantial change in how they identify with a religion.

Q1 Are you an individual, white/Pakeha, aged between 20 - 30 who grew up identifying with Christianity and no longer identify with Christian Religion, or have had a substantial change in how you identify with Religion? (If you changed your religious identity during the above age bracket but are currently over 30, please answer yes)

☐ Yes

☐ no

Q2 Age

_____ Age

Q3 Gender

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Non-binary / third gender

☐ Prefer not to say

Q4 Which best describes your political views on social and economic issues?

- ☐ Very liberal
- ☐ Somewhat liberal
- ☐ Moderate
- ☐ Somewhat conservative
- ☐ Very conservative

Q5 What is your sexual orientation?

- ☐ Heterosexual
- ☐ Homosexual
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Q6 What is your relationship status?

Q7 Education level

- ☐ Less than high school
- ☐ High school graduate
- ☐ Some college
- ☐ 2 year degree
- ☐ 4 year degree
- ☐ Professional degree
- ☐ Doctorate

Q10 Where do you live? i.e. Which city or region?

Q8 Which option best describes how you currently define yourself?

- ☐ Atheist
- ☐ Agnostic
- ☐ Spiritual, but not religious
- ☐ Theist (belonging to some religion)

Q9 Which option best describes your current view?

- ☐ I am certain there is no such thing as God or a higher power.
- ☐ It is not possible for humans to know whether or not God, or a higher power exists.
- ☐ I, personally, do not know whether God or a higher power exists.
- ☐ I believe that God or a higher power exists.
- ☐ Whether or not God exists is of no concern to me.

Q11 Which of the following religious schooling did you attend, from pre-school through high school?

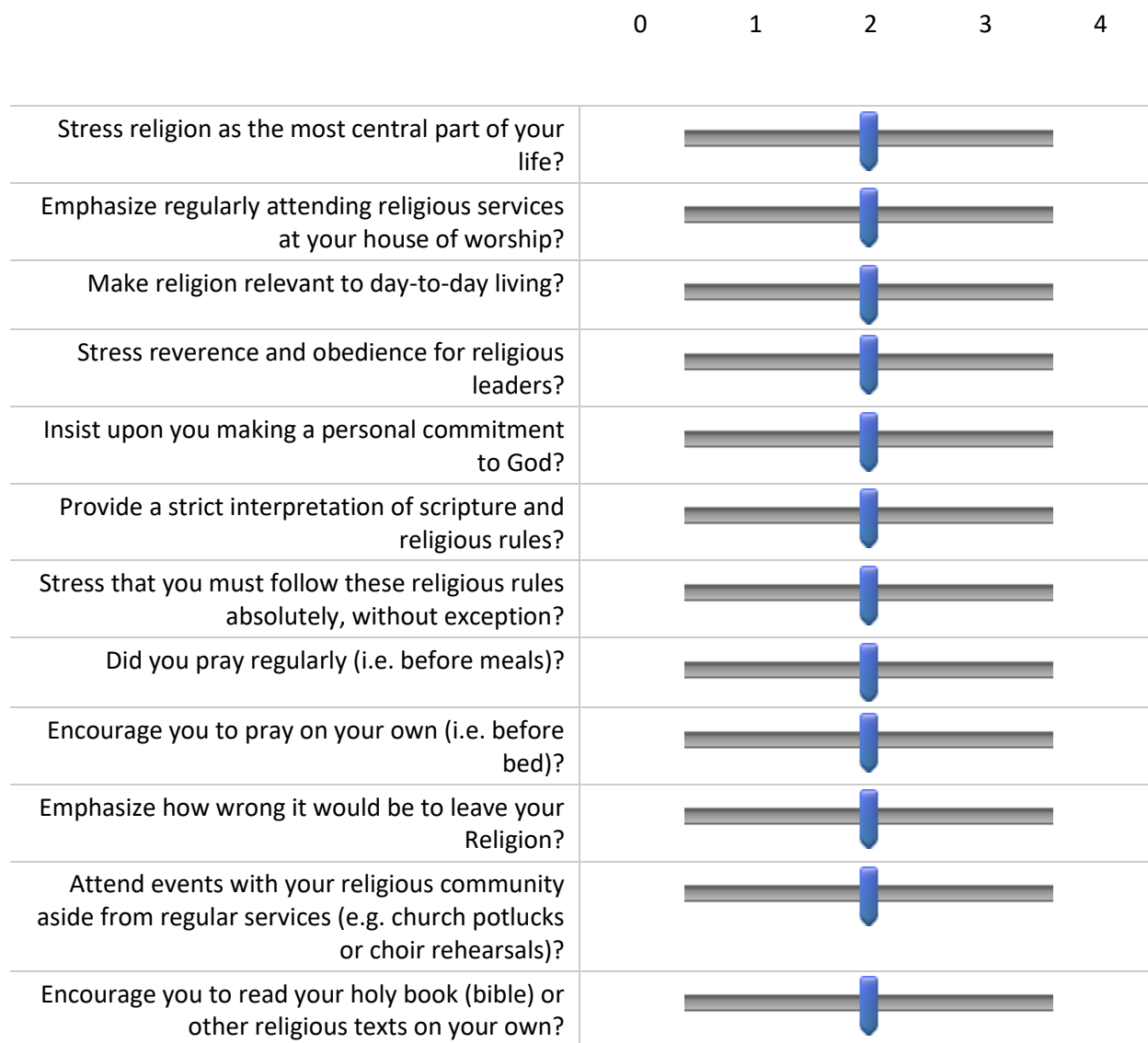
- ☐ Pre-School
- ☐ Primary School
- ☐ Intermediate School
- ☐ High School
- ☐ None of the above - did not attend a religious school

Q12 What Religion were you raised? Please specify to the best of your ability.

Q13 If applicable, please identify the specific denomination, to the best of your ability.

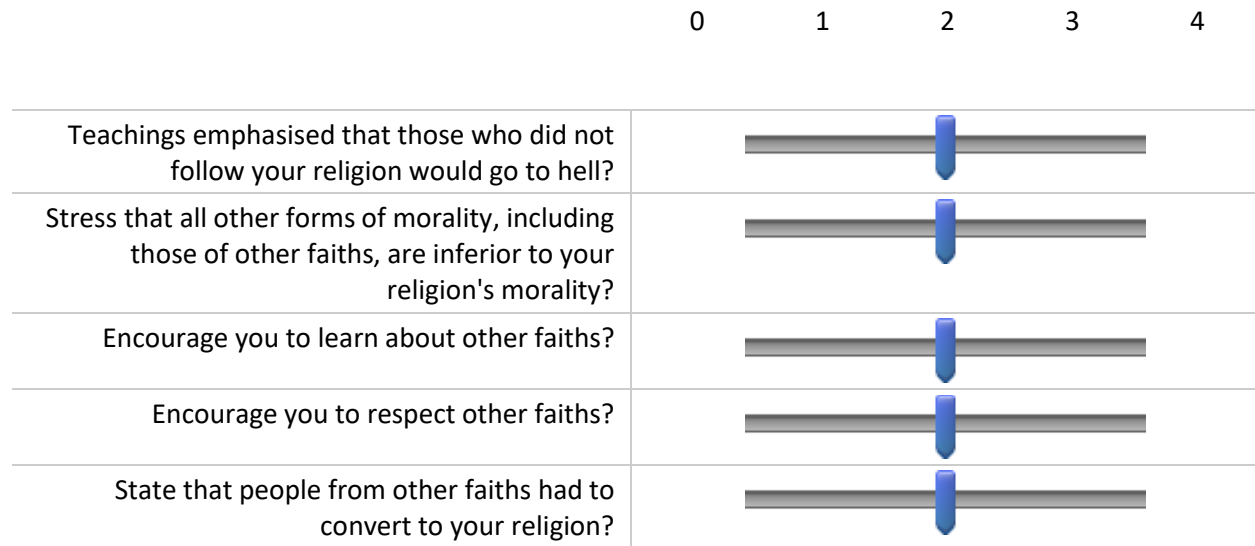
Q15 On a scale from 0 to 4, to what extent did those who taught you about Religion teach the following:

0 = Not at all 1= A slight extent 2= A moderate extent 3= A considerable extent 4= A great extent



Q16 On a scale from 0 to 4, to what extent did those who raised you stress that your Religion was the only true one and also the following:

0 = Not at all 1= A slight extent 2= A moderate extent 3= A considerable extent 4= A great extent



Q17 What age did you start to struggle with your religious identification?

_____ Age

Q18 At __ (respondent's age of first misgivings) __ what proportion of your friends or family did you know to be of another faith?

- ☐ None
- ☐ Very few
- ☐ Less than half
- ☐ About half
- ☐ A majority
- ☐ Almost all or all

Q19 At what age did you decide to no longer identify with Christianity?

_____ Age

Q20 Nowadays, what portion of your friends are also non-religious?

- ☐ None
- ☐ Very few
- ☐ Less than half
- ☐ About half
- ☐ A majority
- ☐ Almost all or all

Q21 What made you decide to no longer identify with Christian?

Q23 What are the values & beliefs that you still hold from Religion?

Q24 What are the values & beliefs that you no longer hold from Religion?

Q27 What are the traditions & rules that you still hold from Religion?

Q28 What are the traditions & rules that you no longer hold from Religion?

Q31 Do you currently agree with what you were taught/experienced within your religious context growing up about the following

	Yes	Maybe	No
Sexual Activity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gender	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Alcohol	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Homosexuality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Death	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Right, wrong & sin	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other religions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hell	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q36 Did any of the above views contribute to you deciding to no longer identify with Christianity?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Q37 Which views contributed to you deciding to no longer identify with Christianity ?

Q33 Has your young adult life experiences and values aligned or contradicted what you taught about the above?

☐ Aligned

☐ Contradicted

Q34 Is there anything you would like to add about your decision to no longer identify with Christian Religion?

Q35 Thank You for completing the survey.

Please email me Luke Furborough - lpf6@students.waikato.ac.nz if you would like to find out more information.